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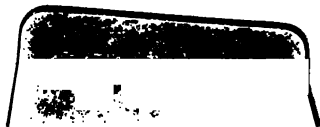
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BENEATH THE WAVE.



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BENEATH THE WAVE

A Novel

BY

DORA RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF "FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW," "ANNABEL'S RIVAL,"
"THE VICAR'S GOVERNESS," "THE MINER'S OATH,"
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III



LONDON
JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL
MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE
FLEET STREET

MDCCCLXXVIII

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251. e. 874.

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BENEATH THE WAVE.

CHAPTER I.

OLD LOVERS.

THE morning-room at Massam was a pleasant room. If the sun were out it came shining into the wide windows, and glinting on the rare and beautiful flowers in the conservatory into which it opened. It had been refitted since the late Lady Hamilton's time, and the rose-coloured satin covering of the furniture and the flower and bird-decked paper on the walls all owed their existence to Isabel's fanciful taste.

A pleasant room! Yet with no pleasant countenance Hayward entered it at the appointed hour at which the wife of his

friend and patron had asked him to meet her there. He was pale, almost haggard. His midnight dream haunted him, but other feelings also were in his heart. Sir George had trusted him. To Hayward this was enough. He was a man wayward and passionate perhaps in some things, but his honour was as yet untarnished as gold. It was Isabel's dishonour, the falsehood and treachery of her life, that filled him with such shame for himself and her. What! his heart was beating fast, and his pulses throbbing, because he was again about to meet such a woman as this? He scorned himself for his own weakness; he recalled, as he stood there, Horace Jervis's serene and earnest face, and Hilda Marston's sweet and patient one.

"These two are my good angels," he told himself; and as he made the reflection he turned, round and behind him stood Isabel, Lady Hamilton.

The words that he had meant to say

to her—the cold, reserved words—died on his lips. Thoroughly and completely unnerved, he stood before the beautiful woman who had caused him such misery and shame. With Isabel, however, it was very different.

“Mr. Hayward,” she said, holding out her little hand, and speaking in her softest tones, “it is long since we met!”

Mechanically Hayward placed his cold trembling hand in hers.

“You are changed,” continued Isabel, fixing her eyes upon his face, “greatly changed since I have seen you. Ah! yes—I heard of your trouble from Sir George. You have lost your poor mother? And——”

“Gone through a great deal since then,” interrupted Hayward, with a harsh little laugh, as Isabel paused. Her pretended sympathy for him about his mother jarred upon his ears. A feeling of indignation took possession of his heart, and the memory of the wrongs that he had ex-

perienced at her hands seemed at that moment very grievous to his soul.

"It is about this that I wish to speak to you," said Isabel, eagerly. "I fear you think you have cause—nay, I know you have cause—to blame me for giving you some pain. But, Mr. Hayward, if you knew all——"

"Lady Hamilton," again interrupted Hayward, almost sternly, "we had better forget the past. I understand it all perfectly now, and it needs no explanation. You were amusing yourself, and I was in earnest, that is all——"

"It is unkind of you to say such things," answered Isabel, quickly. "If I had been only amusing myself, as you call it, what reason should I have for seeking you now? No—I was not amusing myself—I suffered a foolish feeling to creep into my heart—after I had promised to marry Sir George."

The old wily one, who tempted the woman at the beginning, never made a

more insidious speech than this. It wore the garb of truth, as it were, just as his did. The apples were good for food, and were pleasant to the eyes, and for anything that Hayward knew Isabel had learnt to care for him (as she said) after she had promised to marry Sir George.

Hayward cast down his eyes as he heard the words.

The passionate feelings that had once swept reason away, came surging over his heart. What! she had cared for him, he was thinking—perhaps still cared for him!

At this moment the subtle influence of her great beauty, the blinding sense of her graciousness and trustfulness might have resumed its sway, when suddenly—quite suddenly—there flashed back into Hayward's mind the remembrance of her letters to Mr. Hannaway. This changed his mood. Isabel, watching him, saw the softened look grow hard, the quivering lips grow firm.

“I—I still think, Lady Hamilton,” said

Hayward, speaking quietly but steadily, after the last reflection had occurred to him, "that we had better drop this discussion."

"But why?" asked Isabel.

"For many reasons," replied Hayward. "For one thing, it can do no good; for another, you are now Lady Hamilton."

Isabel shrugged her fine shoulders.

"Yes," she said, "I am Lady Hamilton. I have the title and money for which I sacrificed you."

Hayward absolutely gave a start as she ended this sentence. Then the strong feelings of his heart—the half-dead passion, the bitter indignation, the shame and contempt with which he had read the letters that she had penned to the dead man, rushed over him, and he forgot alike respect and reserve.

"What do you want with me?" he said, his face growing pale and his eyes kindling. "Why are you cajoling and flattering me now, like you flattered poor

Hannaway? I won't be your slave. I won't write anonymous letters for you, or scheme and lie at your word as he did. I may as well tell you the truth, Lady Hamilton—I know too much."

Isabel's eyes literally flashed with fury as Hayward said this.

"What!" she said, passionately, "has that coward, then, made you his confidant? Have you also been prying and reading my letters, as the grand gentleman" (and her lip curled) "who did me the honour to marry me has done? Tell me the truth, sir," she went on furiously, "tell me everything you know!"

By this time Hayward had grown calmer.

"I did wrong," he said, biting his lips, and trying to curb his feelings, "to say what I have done. But you roused me almost to madness, Lady Hamilton."

"What do you know?" repeated Isabel.

"Sufficient," answered Hayward, with some sternness. "Yes," he continued, his

conflicting passions again almost overwhelming him, "there was a time when to have pleased you I would have laid down my life! When I believed you to be good as you are beautiful, pure as you are fair. You rejected my love, but still I loved you. I left here broken-hearted, weary of my life, all through] you; but still I did not blame you. I had been mad, I told myself—mad! ¶ All the time when cruel trouble was on me—when my mother lay dying—all the time your image never left me. But now—now, when I know you to be so false, when by Sir George's wish I read the letters you had written to Mr. Hannaway, what can you expect? I did not seek this interview. I did not wish for any explanation to pass between us; but since you urged it, let it be so."

"You read my letters to Mr. Hannaway?" said Isabel, slowly. "All my letters?" She was beginning to think she had indeed played a losing game.

"I read all that Sir George placed in my hand," answered Hayward. "The beginning and end of a long correspondence."

Isabel was silent for a few moments after receiving this communication. In fact, she did not know exactly what to say. Was her power over Hayward entirely gone? she was wondering. The very anger and passion of his language, perhaps, might have told her that it was not. But these wretched letters were hard nuts to crack. She knew that she had flattered Mr. Hannaway in them; that she had fooled him, and it was difficult in the face of them to begin to attempt to fool and flatter another man.

At last she spoke.

"You know about my father's foolish marriage, of course?" she said. "I ought to tell you as some explanation of these letters that you read, and which I most bitterly regret that I ever wrote, that I was intensely averse to my father marrying Lucinda Featherstone. I hinted something

of this feeling to Mr. Hannaway, and he then told me many particulars about the Featherstone family that I felt it was only right that my father should know. But I remembered an old man's—in fact, a dotard's folly! If I were to tell him these things, would he believe me? I thought. So in an hour of madness I listened to Mr. Hannaway. 'Write an anonymous letter,' he said. 'I will post it,' he urged. Thus I fell to a certain extent into his power. My father came here and made some ridiculous scenes. Mr. Hannaway and I had to meet him, and of course deceive him as to our share in the transaction. Do you understand now? It was thus I became intimate with Mr. Hannaway. He never was anything to me but a tool—I never, upon my solemn word of honour, regarded him in any other light."

To some extent Hayward believed this story; indeed, as we know, to some extent Isabel was speaking the truth. But there remained in his mind certain tender expres-

sions—certain tender allusions in the letter to Mr. Hannaway, that it did not get rid of. But it is hard to keep on accusing a person who admits his or her wrong. Isabel had practically done this, and now Hayward's anger began to cool.

"We can do no good, Lady Hamilton, as I told you before," he said, "by talking of these things. I should not have mentioned them; and now I ask you to forgive me for using language to you that I should not have done. But you understand what I have felt?"

"I understand," answered Isabel, "and I forgive you. I forgive you," she continued, "because I believe that your feelings for me were real, and because I know I acted wrongly by you. But," she added, "I have had bitter cause to repent."

"To repent what?" asked Hayward, as she paused.

"That I married Sir George Hamilton," answered Isabel, steadily; and she watched Hayward's face as she spoke.

It flushed, but only for a moment.

"Sir George Hamilton," he replied, also steadily, "has honoured me with his friendship. He has trusted me, and he soothed my dear mother's last hours by his generosity. You can understand, therefore, Lady Hamilton, that I can listen to no word against him ; that whatever cause of anger you have with him, that I can only regret it."

Isabel's lips again curled at this.

"Has he offered you Mr. Hannaway's place?" she said.

Hayward at once understood the taunt ; but if she had wished to regain her power over him, she lost more at that moment than she had any idea of.

"Yes," answered Hayward, with a hardness of tone that Isabel heard ; "so you see I am quite bound to his interests."

"I wish you joy," said Isabel, almost scoffingly. "When do you begin your new duties?"

"It is not quite decided," said Hayward.

"But if your ladyship will permit me," he added, "I shall now take my leave. I promised to join Sir George in the library."

"Perhaps you will consider it part of your new duties to repeat this conversation there?" asked Isabel, not without some anxiety in her voice, though she strove to say it half scoffingly, half jestingly.

"Lady Hamilton, why will you not believe me to be a gentleman?" answered Hayward, with a ring of pride in his tone that made Isabel for a moment respect him.

"I do believe you are one," she said, and she held out her hand to him. "Remember, I have trusted you," she added. But Hayward made no reply. With a bow he left the room; and Isabel felt anything but satisfied, after he was gone, with the result of their meeting.

In the meantime, while this interview was actually going on, the dead man who that morning had been lying at Combe Lodge, had been carried to his grave. Sir George did not go to the ceremony. He

was expected to do so, but he gave no explanation for his absence. The late Mr. Hannaway's nearest relative had been summoned, and this gentleman (who was a cousin) had felt no small anxiety about the lawyer's will. But after the funeral was over, it became known he had left none. He had been cut off in the prime of life, many days in all likelihood lying before him, and had died and made no sign. His cousin who had come to the funeral and a sister of this cousin's were his nearest relations, and they therefore inherited his wealth. Combe Lodge was Sir George Hamilton's property, and Mr. Hannaway's relations were willing to accept a sum of money for the furniture and effects it contained.

Thus Hayward's new home was quite ready for him. Sir George told him this during the day, and some final arrangements were then made between them.

At dinner Isabel appeared, and the husband and wife met once more. Sir

George was cold, but not discourteous, in his manner to her. Before Hayward, he told her that he had offered, and that Hayward had accepted, the appointment held by the late Mr. Hannaway. Isabel made no remark on receiving this piece of information. She still felt most bitterly indignant with Sir George—he had humiliated her so deeply. But she did not choose that her household and her friends should suppose that she was on bad terms with her husband, and she was, therefore, outwardly civil to him. But Sir George made her understand, and she quite understood, that in future their lives were in reality to be apart.

During the next few days Hayward remained at the Park, but he saw very little of Lady Hamilton. Once or twice she gave him the opportunity of speaking to her alone, but he did not avail himself of it. He shrank, in fact, from any more of those dangerous interviews which Isabel loved so well. She was a woman ever

playing with fire. The excitement, the danger of making men madly in love with her, pleased her better than the "dull routine," as she called it, of an honourable life.

Besides this, Hayward was very much engaged. Mr. Hannaway's sudden death had left many things to arrange. Not that the late lawyer had neglected his business, but to manage the working details of a great estate required both time and attention.

So for hours Hayward and Sir George used to sit in the library at Massam, immersed in leases and title-deeds. Sir George seemed to take a sort of interest in Hayward's work, and afforded him all the assistance in his power. Then, about a week after Mr. Hannaway's funeral, Hayward formally removed to Combe Lodge, and took up his residence in the comfortable, almost luxuriously furnished home, where the astute and clever lawyer had lived so long.

Sometimes the memory of the late tenant seemed to haunt Hayward when he first went there. He had a feeling that he was not alone in the silent rooms where the dead man's busy brain had schemed and thought. Other invisible presences, too, haunted him. A beautiful face that had tempted and betrayed the late occupant of these rooms, and which in turn was ready to tempt and then betray Hayward, came shadow-like there too often for his peace.

But he reasoned against this delusion, and at last wisely determined to counteract it. There was another woman's face—a sweet, patient, tender face—that he sometimes thought of also. He had not forgotten his friend Hilda Marston. He had not loved this girl, nor had he permitted himself to love her. He had no means, nor prospect of keeping a wife during their acquaintance in London, and therefore he never entertained the idea. But it was different now. He had a settled home and a settled

income, and he told himself that it would be well if he were married. This new tie would separate him more completely from Isabel. He was separated. In his utmost heart he acknowledged her utter unworthiness, but still she was a snare in his path. Gentle looks and confidential glances were now freely bestowed upon him when he went to Massam Park. Sir George's isolation from his wife made Hayward's duty more difficult to him. So the young man argued, and gradually he made up his mind to ask Hilda to be his wife.

He had written to her twice while he had been in Yorkshire. In his first letter he had told her of Mr. Hannaway's tragic death, but, of course, he made no mention of the discovery resulting from it. Hilda had answered his letter, but she in turn made no allusion to her new relationship with Horace Jervis. She would tell him when he came back, she told herself. The girl was, in fact, uneasy and dissatisfied with herself. She had accepted a man she did

not love, and though she was doing her best to follow her old friend Miss May's advice, and had begun to do so, she yet had by no means accomplished this duty.

One morning after Hayward had been nearly three weeks at Massam, she received a third letter from him. He was coming to town for a day or two, he told her. He would call upon her at a certain hour that he named on the following afternoon. There was nothing peculiar in this, and yet this letter strangely agitated Hilda. She was going to see Philip Hayward again; she would have to tell him now that she was engaged to Horace Jervis.

CHAPTER II.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

HAYWARD arrived at Hilda's lodgings on the following day, at the hour he had named in his letter. He went into the room where she was with a pleasant smile upon his face, and a look of unconscious prosperity about his whole appearance. Somehow he believed that the words he had come to say to Hilda would be welcome ones. He was no vain coxcomb, but he had an idea that she liked him, and that that liking would at his wish be easily kindled into love. He deeply respected Hilda, she was the best girl he had ever known, he thought, and would make the best wife. Then—since he had made up

his mind to ask her—he had naturally pictured her in that capacity. He had thought of her moving about his home and brightening his life. He had thought of her as standing between himself and temptation, and leading him with her gentle hands along the straight and narrow way.

So he met her with pleasure, holding out his hand to her, and looking with affection and kindness into her face. It was only a troubled face that he saw. Hilda had grown thin and pale during his three weeks' absence. She was nervous and agitated also, and Hayward could not understand what ailed her.

“And—and you are going to live at Massam?” asked Hilda, as Hayward released the chill little hand that she had placed in his.

“Yes,” he answered smiling. “I shall be quite a swell now, Hilda. Combe Lodge is really a pretty house, and well furnished—but it’s rather lonely.”

“Yes,” said Hilda.

"Sir George has been so kind to me," continued Hayward. "Fancy, Hilda, he has bought poor Hannaway's furniture, and made me a present of it. I wanted to pay for it, of course—but he is always bringing up the old debt, as he calls it."

"You mean his life?" asked Hilda, looking up.

"Yes—but that's long since now."

"You see he does not forget it."

"No, he is a splendid fellow, Sir George. Noble and generous to the heart's core."

"I am glad you like him," said Hilda, with a sort of dejection in her tone that Hayward could not account for.

"Indeed I do," he answered. "And how is little Ned?" he asked kindly.

"He is asleep;" said Hilda, and she sighed. "Come and look at him," she added, and she led the way to a small bedroom through the sitting-room where they were, and going up to the bed in this room turned down the coverlet, and showed the sleeping face of her little brother.

"How changed he is!" said Hayward, in a low tone, as his eyes fell on the pale and sharpened face of his late pupil.

"Yes, Philip," said Hilda; and she turned her head away.

"Poor little lad!" exclaimed Hayward, rather thoughtlessly, for the moment after he had said it he saw that Hilda had turned away her head to hide the tears that were gathering in her eyes.

"Come, leave him to have his sleep out," said Hayward the next minute, and he took hold of Hilda's hand and led her back to the sitting-room, closing the bed-room door behind him.

"You mustn't fret about him, Hilda," he said, kindly. "He'll pull through all right now, I dare say. He only wants a change." But Hilda's tears fell fast, in spite of Hayward's consoling words.

"Don't, dear Hilda," said Hayward, and he put his arm round the girl's drooping figure. "Don't, dear. Sit down here, I've got something to say to you."

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"Don't, dear Hilda," said Hayward, and he put his arm round the girl's drooping figure. "Don't, dear. Sit down here, I've got something to say to you."

Hilda sat down where he told her, and then with some nervousness and agitation Hayward proceeded:

"You know, Hilda," he said, "that I once——well, made a great fool of myself——about a woman?"

Hilda looked hastily up, and her face flushed.

"Isabel Trevor?" she said, inquiringly. She thought that he was going to tell her of some new trouble or grief that Isabel had brought upon him.

"Yes, Isabel Trevor, now Lady Hamilton," answered Hayward, with an uneasy little laugh. "But, of course, that's all past and gone. She was only amusing herself with me—and I—well, as I said before, made a fool of myself. But I did not come here to talk about Lady Hamilton. I came to talk about ourselves, Hilda—in fact, my dear girl, I came to ask if you would marry me!"

Hayward blurted out the last few words very quickly and incoherently; but the

moment after he uttered them, Hilda gave a little cry as if of pain.

"O Philip!" she said, "O Philip!" and she put one of her hands over her face.

"What is it, dear Hilda?" asked Hayward; and he sat down beside her, and drew her towards him.

"I've got a home to offer you now, Hilda, you know," he continued, "and a fairly good income. The little lad can live with us—and I'll try to make you happy—" And Hayward bent his face down to kiss Hilda's lips. But with a sob the girl turned away her head, and hid it on his breast.

"Don't, don't, you must not," she said. "Philip, this cannot be."

"Why?" asked Hayward. "Do you mean that you cannot marry me?"

"Philip, Philip!" said Hilda, now crying bitterly, "why did you not tell me this before—not until it is too late?"

"Too late!" repeated Hayward, in genuine surprise.

"Yes, yes," sobbed Hilda, still with her head upon his breast. "I have promised to marry some one else—I have promised to marry Horace Jervis."

"Horace Jervis!" said Hayward; and he bit his lips, and his face grew a little pale.

"It was for the sake of the child," wept Hilda. "I could get no pupils—and——this generous man——"

Hayward rose from her side as Hilda said this, and began hastily pacing the room.

"When was this arranged?" he said presently, stopping before her.

"The——day——you went to Massam," answered Hilda, trying to compose herself. "I meant to write to tell you—but—but——I could not."

As Hilda said this, her too-evident distress deeply affected Hayward.

"My poor girl!" he said, laying his hand on her shoulder, "my poor girl! And if——"

Hilda turned her wet face round and rested it against the hand on her shoulder.

"And if I had spoken before?" said Hayward, pityingly.

"I never thought you cared for me," half whispered Hilda. "I knew, all about Isabel Trevor—I feared perhaps that you still——"

"No," said Hayward, hastily; "no. She is the wife of a man I am indebted to in a thousand ways—the wife of a man who completely trusts me. No, she is nothing—must be nothing to me."

Yet Hilda heard his voice sharpen as he made the denial. Still the words were very grateful to her ears. Isabel was nothing to him, then—thank God at least for that.

"I am glad," she said, simply. "And—and—Philip—could it have been—"

He understood what she meant. Had she been free to marry him she would have done so. He looked, in fact, in the girl's face, and knew that she loved him.

"There is nothing but troubles, I think," he said, with some bitterness. He was thinking how he had come to town, almost sure of winning Hilda for his wife. How the girl's heart was his, and yet who stood between them? His friend. The best and noblest man he ever knew. The man who had befriended and succoured him; who had watched his mother's last hours, and to whom with her parting breath she had confided his future life. "Be a brother to him," she had said; and truly Jervis had been a brother to him.

"He must not know this, Hilda," said Hayward, after a moment's reflection. "We—we must bear it for his sake."

"Yes," answered Hilda; and her head fell. Ah, it was not so bitter to him! A disappointment, indeed, but not a heart-breaking one. Hilda knew this, as she sat there silent and sad. He had liked her—would have married her—but his life would go on smoothly without her, while hers would always seem an empty void.

"I should have told you," said Hilda, presently, for the silence between them was becoming very painful.

"Yes," said Hayward, but still he kept thinking. He was indeed greatly surprised. Horace Jervis! A man who seemed to have put away earthly things, and lived but for heavenly ones. And Hilda! Why had she done it? He forgot the long strain on the poor girl's endurance; forgot the bitter necessity for daily bread, not only for herself, but for the hapless little brother thrown upon her hands.

"Well, Hilda," he said, after a few moments' thought, "I trust that you will be happy."

These seemed cruel words somehow to Hilda. Her face flushed and her eyes grew dim again. Yet Hayward did not mean them unkindly. He was disappointed, perhaps, that Hilda should have done what she had done, and yet he felt that it was unjust of him to be so.

"Life is so difficult," said poor Hilda,

presently. "I—I tried to do what I thought best."

"And which no doubt is best, Hilda," said Hayward, more generously. "Whatever are my own feelings on the matter, I know very well you have chosen for the best." But Hilda only sighed and looked at him pitifully as he said these words.

"We must forget this," continued Hayward; and he held out his hand to her. "God bless you, Hilda—God bless you, my dear, dear girl!"

Yes, God bless her, he was thinking with all his heart. She was a sweet girl, and would make a good, sweet, loving wife. He had missed his chance; and Hayward began to realize at that minute that Hilda was, in truth, very dear to him.

They did not say many words to each other after this. Neither of them for a moment contemplated breaking the bonds that bound them to Horace Jervis. He was the friend of one, the betrothed of the other. To both he had ever acted most

nobly and generously, and for no selfish feeling were they going to grieve his unselfish heart. "He must never know this," Hayward had said, and Hilda's own sense of right had echoed these words. Her life had been hard, and it would remain hard. She had tried to do her duty, but it seemed more difficult when she knew that her heart's desire had been so nearly within her grasp.

After Hayward left Hilda he felt very much downcast. He wandered about the streets until it was nearly dusk, and then he went to call upon Horace Jervis.

He was not at home. "Some of his sick sent for him, sir," said the maid-servant who opened the door, "but the housekeeper expects him back directly, so will you come in?"

Hayward went in, and sat down, and waited for his friend. Half-an-hour or so passed, and then the hard-working curate returned. He looked pale and fagged, but his face lit up with pleasure when he saw

Hayward, and with great cordiality he held out his hand.

"My dear fellow! This is indeed a pleasure," said Jervis; Hayward felt thankful at that moment that his hand-clasp was not like that of Judas.

They had, of course, many things to tell each other. Hayward's change in life; his brightening prospects, and his new home were all discussed. Then, with a smile, Jervis told him what he believed to be *his* news.

"I am going to surprise you, I am sure," he said. "You did not think I was a man likely to marry, did you?"

"I have heard your news," answered Hayward, trying his best to look unconcerned and happy. "You are going to marry one of the best of women—you are going to marry Miss Hilda Marston."

"Yes! Who told you? Ah—— I see you have been there. Hilda told me that she would tell you when she saw you—— yes, I am going to marry."

Horace Jervis said the last few words thoughtfully. He loved Hilda. She was the sweetest gift of God, he thought, and as such he prized her. Was he worthy of this crowning blessing, he would ask himself—this sweet helpmate sent to cheer his earthly journey? No truer and purer love, in fact, was ever given to any woman than the love that Horace Jervis gave to Hilda.

And yet she loved him not. That is, she loved him in one way—she honoured and esteemed him above all men; but her love—the love a woman gives sometimes too readily—had been given before Hilda Marston saw Horace Jervis. She had given it unasked, and too late she knew that she could not recall it.

But of this Jervis had no suspicion. It never occurred to him to be jealous. Hilda was going to be his wife, and with pleasant happy words, he told Hayward of their arrangements.

“But that poor little fellow, Ned, is
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the stumbling-block," he said. "We would be married at once if he were only better. But Hilda won't leave him, even for a few days, as he is. The doctors tell me he wants a change, and I must see about getting him away."

"Why not let me take him down to Massam?" said Hayward. "The air is splendid there. Poor Mr. Hannaway's late housekeeper is staying on with me, and she is a kind, motherly sort of person, I think, and you may be sure I will look after him."

"Why, I think this is a splendid idea," said Jervis. "Will you really take him for a week or so, Hayward?"

"I'll be delighted to have him," answered Hayward.

"Then I'll settle it with Hilda, to-night," said Jervis. "Or will you go with me to see her soon, Philip, and then we can both persuade her?"

But Hayward declined this offer. He only sent a kind and pressing message to

Hilda to be allowed to take her little brother back with him to Combe Lodge.

"But you must go and see Hilda again, of course, before you leave town," said Jervis. "You know, Philip, she regards you with the affection of a sister. Indeed, at one time," he added, smiling, "I thought that you two would make a match of it—but I am not jealous now."

"No," answered Hayward, with rather a grim smile, "you see, you are the happy man."

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

HILDA at first was rather unwilling for little Ned to leave her ; he was so fretful and so weak. But she knew that he required change, and she felt that he would be safe with Hayward. It was so kind of Hayward, too, she thought, to think of this. As for little Ned, he brightened up at the very idea.

"I've no doubt Hayward has a pony," said Jervis, diplomatically.

Now a pony had been the crowning desire of Ned's life when he was strong and well. Even now the mention of a pony brought the colour back to the pale, thin cheeks, and a longing to the weary, fretful little

heart. The terrible attack of fever through which this poor child had dragged had completely changed him. From being a fine, healthy, rosy boy, he had become a weak, drooping invalid, with a threatened disease of the hip joint. He would be a great charge for anyone to take him, Hilda knew; but she could depend upon Hayward. He was accustomed to boys for one thing, and for another he had always been fond of little Ned.

So, after thinking it over, Hilda gave her consent. But she did not give her consent to another proposition that Horace Jarvis made. This was that they should be married when little Ned was away. No, Hilda would not hear of this. "Wait until the child comes back better," she said; and Horace Jarvis yielded to her wish.

But he told Hayward that he had asked Hilda to marry him when Ned was away. Hayward felt that he changed colour when he heard this; and he felt (he could not help it) no small relief when

he heard also what Hilda's answer had been.

He knew this when he went to see her about making arrangements for little Ned's returning with him to Combe Lodge. They both were embarrassed when they met, but Hilda was the most so. She could scarcely, indeed, falter out the words of thanks that she had meant to say.

"What nonsense!" said Hayward kindly, in reply to these faltering words. "Of course I shall be pleased to have him, if you think it will do him good."

Ned came into the room presently, and declared that he was both ready and anxious to go.

"Mr. Jervis says you have a pony, sir?" he said; and Hayward laughed at the question.

"What colour do you prefer, Mr. Ned?" he said. "I have a choice of ponies, so you may as well fix."

He meant to buy the lad one, and he did so. Master Ned had his choice of many

ponies, and finally decided on a handsome dun animal, of such frisky tendencies and high spirits that poor little Ned was totally unable to manage or even to mount him. In fact, for the first few days he was at Combe Lodge he was too weak to attempt to ride at all, and when he did so, Hayward was obliged to borrow a work-worn, meek, and rather dilapidated looking pony from one of the farmers near, on which he might try his skill. The dun pony was as yet only kept to be looked at, but this was an unfailing source of pleasure to Master Ned. Hayward was leading the pony in use (the farmer's) one day down a lane near the Park, Ned riding it, when Lady Hamilton, driving a splendid pair of ponies, suddenly passed them. Hayward took off his hat, and Lady Hamilton pulled up her ponies almost at the same moment. Then, when Hayward approached the carriage, Isabel inquired at once who Ned was.

"Who is your little friend?" she said.
"A small brother?"

"I have neither brother nor sister," answered Hayward, smiling. "This young gentleman is an old acquaintance of yours. Don't you remember Ned Marston?"

"Ned Marston!" repeated Isabel. "Do you mean Miss Marston's little brother who was at Mr. Irvine's school at Sanda?"

"Yes, even so," replied Hayward. "He has been ill, poor little lad, and that's what has changed him so much." And Hayward looked kindly at Ned, who grinned and wriggled uneasily on his saddle as Hayward made these allusions to him.

"And where did you pick him up?" asked Isabel, also looking at Ned.

"In London," said Hayward. "He was living with his sister there."

"And how is Miss Marston?" continued Isabel. "How is she getting on?"

"She is very well," answered Hayward gravely.

"Ah—well, good-bye, Master Ned. He looks as if he wanted feeding up, doesn't he? So, Mr. Hayward, mind you give

him plenty to eat." And with a smile Isabel waved her driving whip, and the next moment had driven on, while Hayward proceeded—rather thoughtfully—again to lead Master Ned's pony.

The next day Isabel absolutely drove up to Combe Lodge. Ned, who was gazing out of the library window, announced her arrival to Hayward.

"Here's Lady Hamilton, sir," he cried. "And oh! my, what a big hamper one of the grooms is dragging out!"

On hearing this, Hayward at once went to the hall door, and found Ned's information had been substantially correct. A big hamper was standing on one of the mats outside the vestibule, and to this Lady Hamilton pointed with a smile.

"That's for Master Ned Marston," she said. "It contains grapes, port wine, and jelly, and all sorts of things to make him fat. Don't be offended. I don't suppose you starve him," she added, as Hayward's face, perhaps naturally, assumed a look of

not very agreeable surprise. "Boys, you know, require stuffing; so, please, let him stuff himself."

"Your ladyship is very good," said Hayward, hesitatingly, and turning very red.

"Yes, I thought it was good of me," answered Isabel, with a little laugh. "But, you see, I knew the child long ago, and was sorry to see him look so thin. It was good of you, too," she added, "to have him down here. And now I mean to be very good," she went on, "and to take you and Master Ned out for a drive."

"Thank you,—but I think—," said Hayward, endeavouring to make an excuse.

"Don't think—but come," said Isabel; and she looked into his face in her old, bright way. Oh, weak man! Hayward had sworn to be on his guard against this woman; had sworn to be true and loyal in look, and thought, and deed, to his friend Sir George; yet he yielded to that siren glance. He seated himself by Isabel's side; Master Ned

taking his place by the groom. He sat and listened while Isabel strove to resume her old sway over him. She ignored their stormy meeting at Massam, before Hayward went to town. She ignored that she had been found out, and that Hayward knew that he had once worshipped a false idol. She was beautiful, and she depended on the power that beauty gave her over the hearts of men. Hayward felt he was being made a fool of, and yet he did not take himself away.

Presently they passed Sir George on the road, who was walking with his head cast down, and when he looked up and his eyes met Hayward's, Hayward felt his face flush.

"Are you not going to stop?" he said to Lady Hamilton quickly. "Don't you see Sir George?"

"Of course I see him," answered Isabel, "but I see no necessity for stopping. And with a little careless nod, she passed her husband, while Hayward felt excessively

uncomfortable to be in the position in which he found himself.

Isabel, on the contrary, was rather gratified that Sir George had seen them. He had humiliated her so deeply that she longed to humiliate him. He had brought Hayward here—her old lover—and had made a confidant of this young man about her, and so Isabel had vowed that she would win Hayward over to her side. So she was very gracious to him, but Hayward was uneasy after this meeting with Sir George. He began thinking of Hilda Marston, even as he sat by Isabel, and wishing that he had known of her pure love long ago. Hayward, in fact, was not a man who could be happy in any crooked or unlawful path.

“Master Ned,” said Lady Hamilton, presently, looking round and addressing Ned Marston, “would you like to see your sister here?”

“Hil?” said Ned. “Yes, of course, but I can’t.”

"I've been thinking of something," continued Lady Hamilton, now speaking to Hayward. "I always liked Miss Marston. I think I shall ask her here to stay with me a little while."

Hayward was silent.

"It would be a change for her, wouldn't it?" proceeded Isabel. "And also relieve you of the responsibility of looking after our young friend there? What is her address? I will write to her to-day."

Hayward gave Hilda's address, and then said, with some hesitation:

"I should tell you, perhaps, that Miss Marston is engaged to be married."

"Indeed! To whom, then? If it's to some common man, I don't think I could quite stand that."

"It is to a Mr. Jervis. He is a clergyman and a gentleman—and the best man I ever knew," answered Hayward, gravely.

"Oh, indeed! Miss Hilda hasn't done badly for herself, then?" said Isabel.

"No," said Hayward briefly.

"In that case there can be no objection to my asking her," continued Isabel. "I will ask her to stay——let me see——two months."

Isabel meant until the baby she expected was born. Ned Marston had put Hilda into her head, and she had been thinking that she would like to have her old companion beside her when she was ill. Hilda was sensible and agreeable, she remembered, and would not mind sitting all day in a sick room, and this was the treat that she intended for her old friend.

Hayward heard of this proposed invitation with very mingled feelings. He would be glad to see Hilda again, and yet——

"She may not come," he reflected the next moment; but he was not angry when he heard that Hilda had accepted Lady Hamilton's invitation.

Hilda, in truth, was glad to do so. She shrank from fulfilling her engagement at once, and living in lodgings meant money

and weary anxiety. Her old friend Miss May still dared not ask her to stay with her on account of her school-girls, and Hilda was lonely without little Ned. So she wrote and accepted Lady Hamilton's invitation; and her sister Marian, when she heard of this, thought that there never was such a lucky girl as Hilda. To be engaged to be married and to go and stay at Massam Park seemed two very grand things to poor Marian, toiling in her close schoolroom. Yet, Hilda was anything but happy. She was conscience-stricken because she could not love her lover. Horace Jervis used to wonder at the humility of her manner to him; at the subdued and touching gentleness with which she obeyed his slightest wish. All except one. She would not yet fix the time of her marriage, and Jervis felt that it would be selfish to urge her to do so against her will.

Thus Hilda went to Massam. She could not help thinking, as she travelled there, of her last visit—of the squire's proposal

and Hayward's despair. Everything was so changed now. Isabel was a wife, the squire married, she was engaged, and Hayward — Hilda sighed deeply when she thought of Hayward. His life had been so full of trouble. Had things been different he might have been happy now. Did Hilda find herself picturing that happiness? The pleasant country home which was his, and the fond wife to watch his coming? With a deeper sigh she tried to turn away from the contemplation of that forbidden scene. Life (as she told Hayward) was for her very difficult and hard to understand.

Lady Hamilton received her kindly. Isabel wished Hilda to stay some time with her, and she was also, in a certain cold way of her own, glad to see her old companion. She drove her ponies to the station to meet Hilda, and altogether received her more agreeably than Hilda had expected.

"You have heard about my father's absurd marriage, of course?" said Isabel,

after the first greetings between the two ladies were over, and Hilda found herself seated by Lady Hamilton's side.

"Yes," answered Hilda, with a smile.

"I was furious about it," continued Isabel, "and indeed for that matter I am still. Ridiculous old man! I have got into no end of trouble too about it."

"How is that?" asked Hilda.

"Well, I was in such a rage," replied Isabel, "that I tried to prevent it, and wrote an anonymous letter to my father to tell him about the Featherstones. I told Mr. Hannaway this—you remember Mr. Hannaway, don't you? And he kept some foolish letters about it, and when he was killed Sir George found these letters, and he and I have hardly spoken since."

Hilda cast down her eyes. She, in fact, knew not what to say. It was a new experience in her life to hear a wife speak as Isabel did.

"And how do Mr. Trevor and his
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young wife get on?" presently asked Hilda.

"I'm told its simply sickening," answered Isabel. "It's 'My dear Lucinda,' 'My dearest Lucinda,' every time he speaks to her."

"Well, that is very well at any rate," said Hilda.

"Can't say I agree with you," said Isabel. "I could forgive the girl for marrying an old man, as they were so horribly poor, but to pretend to love him is really too much."

"Perhaps she is grateful to him," said Hilda, slowly. She was thinking of her own engagement; was thinking Lucinda Featherstone had not acted very differently to herself.

"And Patty?" she asked presently. "Is she at home?"

"She's at Sanda. She lives apparently at Sanda, and Mr. Featherstone too. Truly a nice family to be connected with!" And Isabel lashed her ponies in her irritation.

Mr. Trevor and his daughter had, in fact, never met since his second marriage. Socially, Isabel now held herself far above the Featherstones, and she had rejected all advances made by Mr. Featherstone and Patty with the scantest courtesy.

But the old man and his young wife were on better terms than Isabel and her husband. When Mr. Trevor said he would marry Lucinda Featherstone in defiance of all anonymous enemies, Lucinda promised herself that the squire should never repent his generosity. And he never had. Lucinda was a quick girl, and she did her best to make him happy. Mr. Trevor was proud of his handsome young wife, and the old Hall at Sanda was now by no means an unhappy home.

At Massam, on the contrary, Hilda Marston was shocked to find the terms on which the husband and wife lived. Sir George, proud, reserved, and at one time passionately enamoured of Isabel, now regarded her apparently with contempt and

indifference. She had wounded him in his tenderest feelings. He had given up so much for her ; he had cast his whole heart at her feet, and all the while (as he told himself) she had been mocking and jibing at him to a man of totally inferior position to himself ! Truly the iron had entered into his soul on the day when he had read her letters to Mr. Hannaway.

Had he loved her less he could have forgiven her more easily. As it was he could sometimes scarcely restrain the burning words of anger which rose on his lips when he met her careless and defiant glance.

So there was not love in the house, but the "stalled ox and contention." Isabel was bitterly indignant with Sir George for humiliating her in the eyes of Hayward, and made no attempt at reconciliation, even if it had been possible. But she tried (as we have seen) to win back Hayward. She could do this more easily when she had Hilda staying with her, as little Ned served

as a connecting link between Combe Lodge and the Park.

Thus it happened that Hayward was constantly thrown into very dangerous company.

Had Hilda accepted him, he told himself, he need have been afraid, but Hilda had not accepted him. Nay, the poor girl was now trying hard to do her duty. She had no soft looks for Hayward; no confidential words. She was at war with her own heart, and even unnecessarily cold in her manner to her old friend.

She saw, too, that the former infatuation with which he had regarded Isabel Trevor was not quite ended. This made her miserable, jealous, and uneasy, and at times full of anger with Hayward. One day this feeling suddenly overcame her, and she spoke to him some sharp words of reproach. The three were together in the conservatories when this happened; Isabel, as usual, coquetting and toying with her flowers. Presently Hilda saw her give a rose to Hay-

ward, and saw also the manner in which he received it. Then by-and-by, Hayward approached Hilda, and plucking another rose held it towards her.

"Will you have it, Hilda?" he said.

"No!" she answered, sharply, turning her flushed face round, and looking at him: "why do you offer it to me?"

"Because——" began Hayward,

"Mr. Hayward," interrupted Hilda, with heaving breast and flashing eyes, "I had a friend once that —— that I believed would have died sooner than he would have acted as you are doing now!"

"What do you mean?" asked Hayward, glancing at Isabel, who, however, was too far from them to hear what they were saying.

"I have not forgotten," continued Hilda, passionately, "when the woman you are so friendly and familiar with to-day drove you away from her miserable and broken-hearted! Yes, you know what she is—a wife—a married woman—and yet——"

"Hilda, you are an old friend," said

Hayward, with some sternness, "but if any one else had said such words to me—"

"You know they are true," retorted Hilda, in her jealous passion and indignation.

But at this moment Lady Hamilton called out to them.

"What are you quarrelling about?" she cried, from the end of the conservatory. "You remind me of Snap and Jerry over a bone, your expressions are both so warlike."

"Miss Marston is taking the privilege of an old friend, and giving me a lecture," answered Hayward, trying to speak lightly, and approaching Lady Hamilton; but, with an indignant glance, Hilda turned away and left the conservatory.

"What has that young woman been saying?" asked Isabel, when she saw that she and Hayward were alone.

"Ah!—you need not tell me," she continued, languidly. "Poor Hayward! so she has been scolding you, has she, because you have still some little friendship and regard for me?"

CHAPTER IV.

A SON AND HEIR.

HAYWARD was angry with Hilda after the scene in the conservatory, and yet in his heart he acknowledged that he had deserved her rebuke. He went home almost immediately afterwards, and began to call himself to account for his folly. Yet he found himself making excuses for Isabel. Sir George was so cold and hard to her, she was so young and beautiful. It was the old story—the siren voice chanting on the shore, and the mariner drifting into danger as he listened to the too-enchanting sounds.

But if Hayward were disturbed after their brief wrangle in the conservatory

Hilda was almost completely overwhelmed with emotion. The poor girl was scarcely alone when she recalled with bitter self-humiliation what she had said. How utterly ungrateful she must seem to him, she thought. Had she forgotten in her jealous anger that Hayward had saved her and little Ned absolutely from starving in London? Had she forgotten his constant friendship and generosity to her, and how, the moment that he was in a position to do so, he had asked her to be his wife? Hilda hid her face and cried bitterly as she remembered these things. What must he think of her? she thought; and Hayward no doubt at that moment felt considerable irritation on the subject.

But his anger faded away when he saw Hilda the next day. There was no mistaking the look of pain and suffering imprinted on her face. She was walking on one of the roads near Combe Lodge when he encountered her, and with much

nervousness and hesitation she asked if she could speak a few words to him.

"Certainly," answered Hayward. He was riding, but he dismounted at once; and putting his arm through his horse's bridle, prepared to walk by Hilda's side.

It chanced, however, at that moment, that a violent shower came on, and in common courtesy Hayward could but offer Hilda the shelter of his roof.

"Come, Hilda," he said, smiling, as she hesitated; and after a moment's thought she followed him into his house, and was of course received with marks of great joy by little Ned.

But Hilda was too much agitated to respond very cordially to her little brother's signs of affection. She sat down by the library window and looked at the beating rain. Presently Hayward came and stood beside her.

"What a shower!" he said. "It's well you've found shelter, Hilda."

"Yes," she answered. She was not

thinking of the rain, nor the shelter, but how ungrateful she had been to the faithful friend by her side. Hayward, watching her, saw a heavy tear steal down her cheek, and fall upon her knee. This touched him.

"What is vexing you, Hilda?" he said kindly, in a low tone.

Hilda only looked at him in answer, with her wet sad eyes.

"Run, Master Ned," said Hayward the next moment, "to Mrs. Watkins (this was the housekeeper) and tell her to send up some tea for your sister, and stay with her until it comes up. What is it, Hilda?" again he asked when the boy left the room in obedience to his request.

"I—I—am so sorry," began Hilda. "I said yesterday what I should not—I was vexed—I had better go away from Massam, I think."

"But why?" said Hayward. "Yes, Hilda," he continued, gravely. "You said yesterday what you should not," (as Hayward said that he put his hand kindly on

Hilda's shoulder.) "But I am quite ready to forgive you," he added, "if you will never say the same thing any more."

Hilda was silent for a moment. She sat with her hot tears streaming down her cheeks, and with strong and varying emotions struggling in her heart. Then, after a little thought, she turned round and took Hayward's hand.

"I will never say them again after to-day, Philip," she said; "but may I speak a few words to you now?"

"What will be the good, Hilda?" he answered. "I know what you will say—'you made a fool of yourself once about Miss Trevor, take care you don't do it again about Lady Hamilton.' Isn't that it, Hilda? But do not be afraid," he added. "As I told you before you came here, Lady Hamilton is the wife of a man who honours me with his friendship."

"But an unloved and unloving wife, Philip," urged Hilda.

"That may be," answered Hayward (and these words of Hilda's were not unpleasant to his ears); "but she is his wife. I can never forget, under any circumstances, what I owe to Sir George."

Again Hilda was silent for a few moments, and then after another little mental struggle she continued:—

"I—I have no right, I know," she said. "It is only because I—care so much that I speak. I—can never repay you what I owe you, and it cuts me to the heart to see you again being deceived. Don't be angry, Philip, I must speak. Lady Hamilton is not a good woman. She does not love you, or I could forgive her—she does not love her husband, and she will never——"

"Had we not better end this conversation, Hilda?" interrupted Hayward. "I have given you no cause to say what you are doing, and Lady Hamilton has given you no cause."

"Oh! why do I care? why do I care?"

said Hilda, rising suddenly, and beginning to pace the room with uneven, restless steps. "Why did we ever meet, Philip?" she went on wringing her hands, "for it has caused me nothing but bitter pain."

"I—I—am grieved, Hilda," said Hayward; "but what have I done?"

"Nothing! I know you are not to blame," continued poor Hilda. "I got to care for you without any fault of yours. I saw you wasting your heart on Isabel Trevor, and I could not put out my hand to save you—and then—when you knew——"

"You tried to comfort me, Hilda," said Hayward, following the girl's restless steps, and putting his hand through her trembling arm; "and you did do so, my dear. We are both very unhappy, Hilda," he went on gently. "If you could have married me, I would have tried not to cost you any pain. I would have loved you very dearly, Hilda—but as it is not to be——"

"No——" said Hilda, but that renunciation was very bitter to her. More bitter than it had been in London; more bitter now when she had seen Hayward every day; when she felt that if she could marry him he would become a wiser and happier man.

"Let us at least remain friends, Hilda!" said Hayward. "It is good for me to have such friends as you and—Jervis."

"Yes," answered Hilda, slowly, "he is a good man."

"A very good man——and——and, my dear, let me think sometimes that you—a good woman like you—once cared for me. Don't cry, Hilda. Jervis is like gold where I am dross. When I am with Jervis I always feel somehow as I do when I look at the stars."

"O, Philip!"

"His heart is half in heaven, Hilda. That is why sometimes I grudge you to him, for no woman will ever be to him the most absorbing interest of his life."

But here Master Ned once more made his appearance, speedily followed by Mrs. Watkins and the tea-tray, and the conversation, therefore, between Hayward and Hilda ended. But it made a great impression upon Hayward. He went less to the Park after it, and kept out of the way as much as he could of Lady Hamilton's beautiful face.

She also, as weeks went on, became more subdued and quiet. For the first time in her life she began to feel fear. She had never been used to be ill, and she dreaded the time when her child was to be born. Hilda became of some use and comfort to her now. But Isabel was impatient and weary. She hated children, she told Hilda, and did not want to be troubled with them. She had, in fact, no motherly instincts. She could not understand the feeling that prompts the bird to build her nest; that makes the untamed brute return to die by the side of its wounded young.

But the day came at last, and an heir was born to Massam. The gloomy master of the Park heard the news without much sign of emotion.

"What! a boy?" he said to the head nurse, who had hurried down to be the first to tell the glad tidings, expecting a very handsome gratuity for her trouble. "I wish it had been a girl."

"A girl, Sir George!" exclaimed the woman in utter surprise. "What! would you not rather have an heir like the little beauty that has just been born?"

But Sir George made no answer. He took no notice of the expectant bows and smiles of the head nurse, and very little of the more courtly congratulations of the eminent doctor who had been summoned from town to attend the case.

"They are both doing well, are they not?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the great doctor, "Lady Hamilton and your infant heir are as well as I can possibly expect."

"I am glad," said Sir George, briefly ; but he placed a sufficient sum in the doctor's hand to more than make up for his scant words.

Later in the day Hayward entered the library.

"Well, Sir George," he said, holding out his hand, "let me congratulate you. I hear an heir has been born to Massam."

"A son has, at least," answered Sir George, coldly ; and Hayward could not help wondering at his manner and his words.

CHAPTER V.

FIXING THE DAY.

HILDA Marston had been about nine weeks at Massam, when one morning Hayward received a letter from his friend, Horace Jervis. It was as follows :—

“MY DEAR PHILIP,—I hear from Hilda that the little heir, whose appearance has been so anxiously looked for, has arrived, and that her friend, Lady Hamilton, is doing well. Under these circumstances I am going to ask you to give me a bed for a day or two, as I would like to run down to see Hilda, and I see no reason now (as little Ned is so well) why our marriage should be longer delayed. Could Hilda

not be married from Massam? This seems to me to be the most desirable course we could adopt. It would not be any trouble to Sir George and Lady Hamilton, as I am sure it will be Hilda's wish as well as mine to be married as quietly as possible. If little Ned could remain with you until our return from a short wedding tour, all Hilda's anxiety about him would be at rest. Write and tell me what you think, and if it will be convenient for you to put me up next Tuesday and for the three following days.—I remain, dear Philip, yours affectionately,

“HORACE JERVIS.”

Hayward felt very much disturbed after reading this letter. It gave him a kind of shock, and yet it contained no news. He knew this marriage was to be, but it seemed far off somehow until now.

He had not seen much of Hilda lately. She had been, indeed, constantly with Lady Hamilton, and Lady Hamilton was very exacting. But he had thought of Hilda

a good deal. The girl's trembling and agitated confession of how much she had loved him had recurred to him again and again. Isabel had seemed further away, and Hilda nearer to him, during the weeks which had preceded the birth of Isabel's child. He had not forgotten that Hilda was engaged to Horace Jervis, but he had always remembered it with increasing aversion to the idea. Now it was brought to him face to face. Jervis was evidently coming to Massam to urge Hilda to fix the wedding day.

Yet he could, not of course, refuse to receive him. His errand was a legitimate one, and Hayward was bound to treat him with all courtesy and kindness.

Strange to say, he expected another guest also, just about the time Horace Jervis had proposed to come. This was no other than his old friend, the Rev. Matthew Irvine. Many letters had passed between Combe Lodge and the parsonage of Sanda since Hayward had been in York-



shire. The parson's welcome loan of ten pounds had long since been returned out of Hayward's salary in London. But when he got to Combe Lodge he did not forget the Irvines. Mrs. Irvine's heart had been uplifted by a present of a very handsome dinner service, and to Miss Amelia Shadwell Hayward had forwarded one of the best pianos he could procure in town. To the parson himself he had sent a gold watch with a suitable inscription, and with no small pride the Rev. Matthew had donned his "boy's gift," as he called Hayward's watch, and had laid the old silver tub, that he had worn all his life before, away for ever. And now he was going to visit Hayward. Mrs. Irvine had been invited also, but her stern sense of duty prevailed over her love of pleasure.

"No, Matthew," she had said to her spouse, "you go and enjoy yourself, and I will stay and look after the school. But mind you, write and tell me exactly how Hayward looks. Don't be led away by his

having a colour, for that's often a sign of something wrong. I'd rather hear that he looked sallow, as that's natural to him, and I'm always doubtful of your fine complexions."

"Very well, my dear," said the parson. "Anything else?"

"Sound him," said Mrs. Irvine, in her hollow tones. "I don't encourage the girl. I tell Amelia Shadwell that the dinner service, and the piano, and the gold watch all meant nothing. That is, nothing particular; but still *they may*. If Hayward has any fancy for Amelia Shadwell, it is our duty to encourage it."

"But, my dear, I don't think he has," answered the parson meekly.

"You mayn't think so, Matthew, but she may," answered Mrs. Irvine, oracularly. "At all events there's no harm done by sounding him." And the Rev. Matthew, having promised to sound Hayward, was permitted to prepare for his journey.

The idea of this visit gave great pleasure

to the genial parson. Not many pleasures had come in his way, poor man, all his life; but this really was one. To go and stay with his "dear boy," when that dear boy had come in for some of the good things of this world, and to have a few days' rest and change, seemed a wonderful piece of good fortune to the Rev. Matthew.

He could not resist bragging a little to the Squire of Sanda of Hayward's invitation.

"You see prosperity has not turned his head, Mr. Trevor," he said. "He has not forgotten his old friends."

"I was pleased to hear that my son-in-law, Sir George, had offered the late Mr. Hannaway's appointment to Mr. Hayward," said the squire, in his old pompous fashion. "Sir George, of course, owed this young man a good deal."

"Yes," said the Rev. Matthew, with his humorous smile.

"But he has now amply repaid this," continued the squire. "My father-in-law,

Mr. Featherstone, informs me that the appointment is worth something like £1,000 a year. An excellent appointment!"

The squire's family and the parson's were now on more intimate terms than formerly. Lucinda Featherstone had never been proud in her unmarried days, and she was not proud now. She was kind to Mrs. Irvine, and kind to Amelia. Indeed, Lucinda was doing her best to win the good-will of those around her, and show her gratitude to her elderly husband. She was grateful to him for his kindness to her father and sister. Graceless Antony Featherstone now spent a good deal of his time at Sanda Hall. His debts and his duns couldn't very conveniently follow him there. He had, moreover, to eat and drink of the best at another man's cost, and a good horse to ride on, and plenty of game to shoot; so what did Antony want more? Nothing, he told himself, and he was always telling Lucinda that she was the pride and darling of his heart.



Patty, too, almost always lived with her sister. Two lively young women trying to please him was a new experience in the home life of the squire, and he decidedly liked it. He was vain and pompous, but he meant well in his narrow way, and he was really fond of his young wife. "She had played her cards well," her father said ; but Lu had not only played well, but was a very pleasant and unassuming winner.

She and Patty Featherstone knew, of course, all about the great lady at Massam Park. Lady Hamilton had all but cut her old friends, and never thought of inviting them to meet her new ones. But her mother-in-law, Lu, and her neighbour, Patty, still continued to know a good deal about her doings. They had heard the rumours about Mr. Hannaway's devotion, and it had come out somehow that as soon as the breath was gone from the late lawyer's body, Sir George had ridden over to Combe Lodge, and shut himself

up in the library ; and that since then the husband and wife had lived on bad terms.

Isabel thought that she hid this, but she did not. Her maid had overheard Sir George speaking in a stern voice to her, when he had first returned from town, after Mr. Hannaway's death ; and the lady's maid had reported this in the servants' hall, and so the stormy interview and its upshot had crept out.

When Lady Hamilton's child was born, most of her friends and neighbours knew that she and her husband were anything but friendly. The good-natured ones argued well at the birth of an heir : "This will make it all right," they said ; and the ill-natured ones sneered, and wished it might do so. But both the good-natured and the ill-natured came to congratulate Lady Hamilton of Massam. Isabel was a great lady still, even though Sir George might have some cause to be annoyed at her conduct.

Some ten days after the little babe had



made its advent, to take its share amid the lights and shadows of the world, Isabel was lying on a couch in her luxuriously furnished dressing room. Hilda Marston was sitting near her, and was reading a novel aloud to her, when the cries of the newly-born child, who was in the adjoining bed-room, disturbed the mother.

"Hear that little wretch!" said Isabel. "Do, Miss Marston, go and tell the nurse to take it at once to another room."

Hilda rose to obey her command, and went into the bed-room, and directed the nurse to take the child away.

"Did my lady say that?" said the nurse, casting up her eyes in horror; for to her mind babies were the kings of earth, and everything ought to give way to their comfort and convenience.

"Yes, the child disturbs her," said Hilda, bending down and kissing the little pinched red face, enclosed in embroidered flannel and lace frills.

"Does it?" said the nurse, but she said it

like an anathema. "Lady Hamilton would come to no good," she was thinking, "and deserved no good, after her unnatural conduct, and we would see what would be the end of it."

After all, the nurse was not far wrong. The woman who hears her baby cry unmoved is not a good woman, and will probably—as the nurse thought—"come to no good." The heart must be hard and cold when no tender instinct thrills through it at a baby's trustful touch.

As Hilda was returning to the dressing-room after having delivered her message to the nurse, Isabel's lady's maid rapped at the door, and brought in several letters. There were five for Lady Hamilton, and one for Miss Marston, which, unlike the others, bore neither monogram nor crest. But Hilda knew the handwriting, and retired at once to one of the windows to read her letter.

It was from Horace Jervis. A manly affectionate letter, in which he told her

he was coming to Massam on the following day, and that he hoped to prevail upon her to consent that their marriage might take place almost immediately. Hilda read thus far with quickened breath, but presently a burning flush spread over her face as she went on with the letter :—

“I told Hayward,” wrote Horace Jervis, “why I wished to come to Massam, and he has kindly invited me to stay with him. He will keep little Ned with him while we are away; so you, my dear one, may be quite sure that he will be well cared for. Do not let us wait any longer, dear Hilda. Lady Hamilton will, no doubt, give her permission that our quiet wedding may take place from her house, and Hayward will act as best man, if one should be required. But we need not many attendants to the altar, Hilda. If God’s blessing goes with us, that will be enough. May it be with you, my Hilda, now and for ever!”

It was a solemn letter to receive—

serious and solemn. Hilda knew that Horace Jervis never doubted her as she read it; that he believed her heart was as it should be, and that she would make him a loving as well as a faithful wife. With a deep sigh she restored the letter to its envelope, and as she did so, Isabel called out from the other end of the room.

"What a sigh!" she cried. "I declare I feel the draught it made here. What has he done, this lover of yours? Jilted you? Parsons, you know, are always carrying on semi-religious sentimental flirtations with the young ladies of their congregations. 'She works religious petticoats,' eh?" And Isabel gave a little scoffing laugh as she made the quotation.

Hilda made no answer to this speech; but she rose from her seat by the window, and went and stood by the fire, near which Isabel's couch was placed.

"Here's a lot of flattery and nonsense," said Isabel, once more addressing her, and pointing to the various notes of congratula-

tions that she had just received, and which were lying on the table before her. "There's just one worth having though, for it's from the handsomest man I know—Hugh Warrington."

"I think I remember him," said Hilda. "He is Mrs. Woodford's brother, is he not?"

"Her half-brother, and the coldest, handsomest, and most fascinating man I ever saw."

Again Hilda made no remark. Then presently she said, with some hesitation:

"Lady Hamilton, Mr. Jervis is coming here to-morrow."

"Is he really?" said Isabel. "Well, you are quite delighted, I suppose?"

"He is going to stay with Mr. Hayward," continued Hilda.

"Ah, indeed! Well, I shall be pleased to make his acquaintance. Mr. Hayward tells me he is a very gentlemanly man."

"Yes," said Hilda, with rather a sad smile.

"When do you talk of getting married?" asked Isabel.

Hilda hesitated and blushed.

"A brilliant idea has struck me," went on Isabel, before Hilda could well answer her question. "Why not get married here?" We could arrange it in ten days or a fortnight, and it would make a little amusement in these dull times. We could ask the Woodfords, for, of course, the Vicar would have to marry you, and I will ask Captain Warrington. I declare it would be great fun."

"But——" began Hilda.

"My dear, spare me the 'buts,' and it is 'such a short time,' and so on, of the blushing bride. My advice to you is—get married when you can. Not many men would marry a girl entirely without money, like you."

"No," said Hilda, "it requires some generosity," and her face flushed as she spoke. She was thinking of Hayward. He, too, had asked her, though she had no money.

God bless and keep him for his generous thought!

"I should think it does require some generosity," said Isabel. "I'm not given to match-making in general, but I think I shall try to arrange yours. I shall tell Mr. Jervis how much nicer it would be for you to be married from here than from a London lodging."

"That is what Mr. Jervis thinks himself—what he urges in this letter," said Hilda, with just a little touch of womanly pride in her tone.

"Then you don't say you are hesitating?" asked Isabel. "Nonsense, my good creature! I will settle it all with the lover before I have been half-an-hour in his company. We shall have a wedding at Massam, and get up some little gaiety for the occasion."

"No, please don't," said Hilda, earnestly. "It is most kind of you to wish me to be married here, but don't have any company if it is arranged so. Both Mr.



Jervis and myself would really dislike it."

"Well, we shall see," said Isabel. And so she began planning and arranging everything in her own mind. The wedding became one of her fancies. When an idea took possession of her, she remained immersed in it for a while, and then another fancy succeeded. But when Horace Jervis arrived at the Park, on the following day, she was still full of the wedding, and determined that it should take place at Massam.

Hilda was very much agitated when she saw again the calm sweet face of the young man whose wife she had promised to become. She felt somehow as if she were guilty towards him. His perfect truthfulness, his serene faith in her, filled her heart with self-reproach. It seemed the greater wrong because he never suspected that her love was not entirely his own.

Lady Hamilton received him with great courtesy, when he was presented to her.

She was, indeed, impressed by his simple, yet dignified bearing, and smiled her sweetest smiles during the interview which took place between them. Yet she did not feel quite as much at ease in his presence as she expected. She had donned her most becoming dressing gown for the occasion, and was indeed fair to look upon; and yet, after Jervis's steady gaze had rested on her lovely face for a few minutes, something in its expression repelled him. Beautiful as Lady Hamilton was, the memory of Delilah's snareful charms rose once or twice hauntingly to the young clergyman's mind.

"So you and my friend, Miss Hilda, contemplate what I consider the very rash act of matrimony?" said Lady Hamilton, smilingly, addressing Jervis, after they had talked together for some little time on ordinary subjects.

"Yes," answered Horace Jervis; and he looked at Hilda, who turned her head slightly away.

"And when?" continued Lady Hamilton. "I hope you don't think of having a long engagement, for they are such wretched things?"

"It is about this that I have taken the liberty of coming to Massam," answered Jervis. "I most earnestly wish Hilda to marry me at once."

"Quite right," said Isabel, with a little decisive nod of her head. "Miss Marston is an old friend of mine," she continued the next minute, "and it will give both Sir George and myself great pleasure if she is married from Massam."

After this it was all settled. It seemed to Hilda that she had no voice in the arrangement, but stood there with burning cheeks and beating heart, listening while Lady Hamilton and Jervis fixed everything between them.

"My dear, the bride elect never speaks on these occasions," said Isabel, repressively, when Hilda once, in a faltering voice, ventured to make some objection.



Yes, it was all arranged. When Hilda and Jervis left Lady Hamilton's dressing-room, their wedding-day was fixed and their destiny sealed. It was to be in a fortnight from this time, Isabel settled, and the wedding dress was to be her gift.

"May this be for your happiness, my dearest!" said Jervis, taking his promised bride in his arms, and kissing her cold cheek, when they were alone. But Hilda's tears fell fast in reply.

"You are so good," she murmured, "far, far too good."

She thought this many and many a time during the next few days. He was so good. Always thinking of her, and trying to make things easy and pleasant to her. He was not a man who cared for gay dress, or indeed ever noticed it; but he sent Hilda a cheque for a hundred pounds on his return to town to buy her modest trousseau with, and the poor girl shed some bitter tears over the kindly tender words which accompanied this gift.

"I am not a rich man, my dear one, you know, or I should have sent much more," he wrote. Ah! he was rich, Hilda thought, rich in treasures that money could not buy. This was what filled Hilda with such constant self-reproach and pain. If he had been a shade less perfect; if he had been selfish, rough, or unkind to her, she could have borne it better. As it was, she felt as if she wronged him every time that the recollection of Hayward recurred regretfully to her heart.

These were very unhappy days also for Hayward. Of course he heard all about the wedding, and the bridegroom's gift, and even the wedding dress. Isabel sent for him and told him about these things, and wondered to him what made the bride not appear elated at her good fortune.

"I think she is a most lucky girl," she said to Hayward; but Hayward made no answer to this opinion.

He never saw Hilda. The girl shrank from him, and dreaded the idea of seeing

his face again after the time of her marriage was fixed with Horace Jervis. Sometimes Hayward would ask himself impetuously if all this were right. Was it right thus to deceive Jervis? Far better tell him the truth, he would mentally argue, and let him decide. But then, again, the remembrance of the complete unselfishness of Jervis's character rose before him. Hayward knew how he would decide. He would give up self. "He is so good," Hayward also repeated to himself, as poor Hilda had done. They both owed him so much that their lips were bound to silence. But we can understand the struggle. Even Sir George noticed, and spoke both to Hayward and Isabel, about the change in Hilda's appearance.

"Is this marriage any arrangement of yours, Isabel?" he asked of her, in the cold stern way in which he now habitually addressed his wife.

"My good creature," answered Isabel, shrugging her shoulders and putting on

her grandest air, "what do you mean by any arrangement of mine? Miss Marston was engaged when she came here, and had been engaged for some time; and Mr. Jervis came by her wish, I understand, to settle the exact time of their marriage."

"Well, all I can say is," said Sir George, "she looks anything but happy. I never saw a girl so much altered."

"Well, all I can say is, then, that she is a fool," said Isabel, contemptuously. "Mr. Jervis is a gentleman—is well off, and certainly not ill-looking, and she has simply nothing to offer in return—not even beauty."

"She is better without it," said Sir George briefly; and he turned away. But he said something of the same sort to Hayward, and his words left a very painful impression on the young man's mind.

"What is the matter with Miss Marston?" he asked, addressing Hayward, who was writing some business letters, for him in the library at the Park. "She looks so utterly wretched."

" I——I—— do not know," answered Hayward hesitatingly ; but he made up his mind at that moment to try to see Hilda once more.

He wrote a note to her to ask her if he could do so during the day. But before night came, a few ill-written and tear-stained lines were brought to him.

" I cannot see you, Philip ; I dare not. May God bless you !

" H. M."

There was nothing more. In these brief words Hayward felt that she took leave of him. On his desk was lying an invitation to be present at her wedding. Lady Hamilton had carried out all her plans, and her favourite, the handsome guardsman, Captain Warrington, had written to his sister, the vicar's wife, to say that he would be down in Yorkshire on such a day, after receiving a private intimation of the approaching marriage from Isabel.

It wanted only a few days to the time when Hayward wrote to Hilda; only a few days, and the girl who loved him so well was to be married to another man! It was at least a very bitter reflection. True love is not lightly won nor lightly lost, and Hayward felt that Hilda's love was very true.

He would have left Massam for a time if he could have done so; but it was not possible. His old friend Mr. Irvine was still with him, and Jervis had written to ask him to put him up the day before the marriage. And then there was little Ned.

Thus Hayward was forced to hide his feelings as best he could. They were anything but happy ones, but it was for Hilda he felt more than for himself, when he held out his hand to welcome her lover, the day before her wedding day!

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEDDING DAY.

It was a wet and dismal morning (though in midsummer) on which Hilda Marston was to be married. But the dull grey light that dawned so slowly did not awaken the bride. For hours Hilda had lain awake, and heard the clocks strike, and counted the time. One hour nearer, and then another! Tick, tick, went the clocks; beating, beating, Hilda's sad and aching heart. It was a solemn and sorrowful morning to her. Outside the rain was driving and beating against the window-panes; inside, the girl was praying and suffering, "O God! help me to do right. O God! help me never to wound or pain his generous heart!"

Such was her prayer, repeated again and again in the darkness ; repeated when the morning dawned and the dull light stole in. "Help me to do right !" It was a piteous cry, was it not, going up from the depths of a very true, tender, and unhappy heart ?

The same morning Hayward awoke with an almost intolerable sense of pain and annoyance. He got up and looked out and swore at the weather. Yet he would have felt equally disgusted if the sun had been shining. Everything had gone wrong, he thought, and Hilda—dear Hilda—he wondered if she were thinking of him then !

No, not then. She was up now, and her face was very calm and pale. Isabel sent her head waiting woman to dress her, and this person knew her business well. Hilda made a very fair and graceful-looking bride in the tasteful costume that Isabel had provided for her. She had never been dressed thus before. She scarcely knew herself as she saw her reflection in the



cheval glass, in the long-trained and lace-trimmed skirts that was draped around her.

"If only, Miss, you didn't look so pale," said the lady's maid, admiring her own handiwork, "you would look lovely."

"Well, I must be content to look pale, Ritson," answered Hilda, with a quiet smile, and she put her hand to her side as the spoke.

There was a strange aching pain there. All night it had been there, and it was still there. It seemed to take Hilda's strength quite away, and she sat wearily down after the lady's maid had finished dressing her.

"My lady will be coming to see you directly," said Ritson, as she took her leave, and so Hilda sat still and waited.

Presently Isabel, dressed with all the perfect taste which was one of her attractions, entered the room. The delicate blue silk and rich white lace in which she was robed became her fair skin and golden hair only too well. Never, Hilda thought, had

she seen her look so beautiful. She wore her diamonds, and her little hands and slender throat were literally ablaze with the sparkling gems.

"How do I look?" she asked of Hilda; and Hilda answered with all honesty that she had never seen her look so well.

"That is right!" said Isabel, with a gratified smile. "And you too look well," she added, glancing at the bride. "Yes, your dress becomes you; Mr. Jervis has no reason to be ashamed of his choice."

While this conversation was going on, the wedding guests were beginning to assemble downstairs. It had been arranged that the small party invited to attend the ceremony was to meet at the Park in the first place, and then walk across the grounds to the church, which was situated immediately outside of them. But the drenching rain which was falling upset this plan. To walk through the damp park was now impossible, and Sir George therefore gave orders for three carriages to be prepared.

When Isabel went down among her guests, she found that the bridegroom, and our old friend Mr. Irvine, had already arrived. Hayward had not yet appeared, but Horace Jervis informed Lady Hamilton that he would do so presently. Then the vicar's wife, Mrs. Woodford, came into the room leaning on the arm of her handsome half-brother, Captain Warrington, and apologized for bringing him by saying that he had arrived unexpectedly the night before at the Vicarage.

"I am always glad to see Captain Warrington," said Isabel, in her sweet-toned voice, as she gave him her hand; and she looked up smilingly into his face as she spoke.

Neither of them said anything about the invitation that Isabel had sent Captain Warrington. He, in fact, quite understood that he was expected not to mention it. He admired Lady Hamilton; and Lady Hamilton had the good taste, he thought, to return his admiration; and he was quite

ready, therefore, to keep as many of her secrets as she chose to confide to him.

There were only one or two other people expected. A young girl who was going to act as bridesmaid, and who was a cousin of Mrs. Woodford's, being amongst them. Isabel had not chosen to ask her "society" friends on this occasion. Hilda Marston was very well, she thought, and she was glad to do her this kindness; but of course her position was to be considered. Captain Warrington was the only exception that she made to this rule, and she was very intimate with Captain Warrington. If Sir George had read all her letters to the handsome guardsman, he would have had more reason for his angry jealousy than for any of those that she had written to the late Mr. Hannaway. She had trifled with the dead man's feelings, but she had never really cared for him. But she was not trifling with Captain Warrington. He was too cold and too vain to be trifled with. Isabel knew that her power over

him was very slight; and this made *his* power. If he had thrown himself virtually at her feet, as her husband, Hayward, and Mr. Hannaway, all in turn had done, she would have cared very little more about him. But Captain Hugh Warrington made no sign of throwing himself at her feet, or at the feet of any woman. He was so handsome and so indifferent, that, for the first time in her life, Isabel was beginning to think she was in love.

Presently Sir George joined the assembled wedding party, and almost at the same moment Hayward did so too. Hayward looked gloomy enough, and felt gloomy enough. All the morning he had been playing host to Horace Jervis and Mr. Irvine, and the strain had not been light. Jervis was so happy that his happiness jarred severely on Hayward's nerves. He had stayed behind to have a moment's breathing time, he told himself; and as he crossed the park in the rain he looked up at the windows of the

room that he knew the bride elect occupied.

There was a "face at the window" as he did so—a pale face, a familiar face. Hilda was standing there in her bridal dress, looking vaguely out at the rain. She saw Hayward, and it gave her a sudden shock. The room seemed to grow dark to her, and her aching heart to stand still. Then she felt herself falling, and a cold dew breaking out upon her brow.

In the meanwhile Sir George was inquiring for her downstairs. He had agreed to give her away at the coming ceremony, and it was therefore settled that she was to go in the same carriage as he did to the church.

"Perhaps she does not like coming down alone," he said to Isabel; and then, with the stately courtesy that generally distinguished him, he left the room for the purpose of bringing in the bride.

As he crossed the hall he saw Isabel's

chief lady's maid, Ritson, hurrying down the staircase, looking exceedingly alarmed.

"What is the matter, Ritson?" he asked.

"Oh! Sir George," answered the woman, "send for a doctor and come upstairs at once. My belief is," she added in a half-whisper, so that the rest of the servants who were standing about might not hear, "that Miss Marston is—dead!"

"My God! what do you mean?" exclaimed Sir George; and he followed the trembling woman at once upstairs to Hilda's bedroom.

Hilda was lying on the floor by the window. She had fainted, and in falling she had cut her forehead, for a faint stream of blood was oozing from it. In her white dress, and with her white face, she had a ghastly effect, but the moment Sir George lifted her in his arms he saw that she was not dead.

"She has fainted," he said to Ritson. "Unfasten her dress, open the window, and bathe her face. She will come

round presently. See, she is beginning to move."

With some deep-drawn sighs Hilda recovered consciousness. Presently she lifted herself up, and looked inquiringly] at Sir George and Ritson.

"You are better now," said Sir George, kindly, "but you must not be disturbed any more to-day."

"But—the marriage?" said poor Hilda, faintly.

"It must be postponed," said Sir George. Then he sent Ritson for some wine; and Hilda having at his request swallowed some of it, he desired the woman for a few moments to leave the room.

"Miss Marston," said Sir George, as Ritson closed the door behind her, addressing Hilda both with courtesy and kindness in his manner, "as your host I think I have a right to ask you one question. Is this sudden illness which has overtaken you caused by any mental unhappiness?"

The colour that rose to Hilda's white

face at these words told Sir George something of the truth.

"If this marriage is distasteful to your feelings," continued Sir George, "pause, I beseech you, in time. I have noticed that you have looked unhappy lately, and if you have been forced or urged to accept Mr. Jervis——"

"No, no," said Hilda, quickly. "I am going to marry him. Say nothing of this, Sir George——say I fell——"

But as she spoke Isabel, followed by Horace Jervis himself, hastily entered the room. A rumour had spread downstairs that the bride had been taken suddenly ill, and this had soon reached the assembled guests. Isabel at once hurried upstairs to learn the truth, and Jervis, in much agitation, had naturally followed her.

"What is it? What has happened?" asked Isabel.

"Miss Marston has fallen and hurt her forehead," answered Sir George, gravely. "I think, Mr. Jervis," he added, looking

at Jervis, "that all idea of marriage must be given up for to-day."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Isabel. "Ritson, get some sticking-plaister. However did you happen to do this, Miss Marston?"

But Hilda made no answer. She was looking at Jervis, whose face showed so much agitation and pain.

"Do not be afraid," she said, addressing him, and trying to smile. "I shall be all right in a few minutes. Our marriage need not be delayed." And she held out her hand to him.

Jervis knelt down by the side of the couch where Sir George had laid her, as Hilda said this.

"Hilda," he asked, in a half-whispered voice, broken with anxiety, "tell me the truth. What has caused this, Hilda? Surely no fear about our future happiness?"

"No——" answered Hilda. "But—— but, Horace," she added, eagerly, "don't

let anyone be present. I will be married——but——let no one be there.”

Hilda made this request with earnest eager eyes, as well as lips. Both Sir George and Lady Hamilton caught her pleading tones, and saw her pleading looks, and Isabel spoke sharply the next minute to Jervis.

“What does she say?” she said.

“I also must ask Lady Hamilton,” said Jervis, rising. “Hilda still wishes our marriage to take place, but naturally after her accident she hopes that no one will be present except ourselves—and, perhaps Sir George?” he added, looking at Sir George, inquiringly.

“But how can such a thing be?” said Isabel imperiously. “These people down stairs have been asked to a marriage, are waiting to see a marriage, and what excuse can be made to them? It is impossible!”

“Oh! Lady Hamilton,” said Hilda, putting out her hand and taking Isabel’s

imploringly, "don't ask me to be married before anyone now. I could not—I could not!" And tears began to roll heavily down the poor girl's pale cheeks.

"No excuse need be made to your guests, Isabel," said Sir George, speaking to his wife in the cold tones of authority which he now habitually used to her. "The fact of Miss Marston's accident is sufficient. The marriage must either be postponed, or if you wish it to take place——" And he paused and looked inquiringly at Hilda.

"Will you only go with us, Sir George?" said Hilda. "Dear Lady Hamilton, please let this be so."

"It shall be so, if it is your wish," said Sir George, decisively.

"Then I wash my hands of the whole affair," said Isabel, indignantly. "I never heard of anything so truly absurd."

"Your comments are quite unnecessary," retorted Sir George. And upon this, with a scornful glance and a shrug of her

shoulders, Isabel walked haughtily out of the room.

"If you will let me know when I am required, I am quite at your service," continued Sir George, addressing Jervis, after she was gone.

The bridegroom looked at the bride. Hilda's face was pale and unmistakably agitated, and for a moment a sort of chill doubt crept into Jervis's heart.

"Hilda," he said, again approaching her, and taking her cold hand in his, "if——if——you hesitate——"

"I do not, Horace," she answered. "Ask Ritson to come to me," she continued the next minute, and she rose as she said this from the couch. "I will bathe my face and change my dress, and then, Sir George, we can go."

"I distinctly understand that this is your wish," said Sir George, looking pointedly at Hilda.

"Yes," she said, more firmly than she had yet spoken.

And what more could Sir George say? Nothing; and a few minutes later all the arrangements for this strange marriage were completed. There is no need to go into details. Presently Hilda, pale and trembling, went down the stately staircase of Massam, clinging tightly to Jervis's arm, and Sir George followed them, and the three were then driven to the church.

There Horace Jervis and Hilda Marston were married. Sir George explained to Mr. Woodford, who was waiting for them, the cause of the absence of the wedding guests, and the poor little vicar went rather nervously through the service in consequence. But there was no reason. If the bride's voice was rather faint, it never faltered. The momentary weakness which had struck her down was gone. She meant to do her duty, and the sense of doing it gave her strength.

"O God! help me to do right," she prayed in the morning; and the same prayer,

though unspoken, rose from Hilda's heart as she knelt before the altar, with her hand tightly clasped in that of Horace Jervis.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE WEDDING.

A WOMAN in a rage is generally not a very pleasant person to encounter, and Isabel was in a towering rage when she rejoined the wedding guests after her interview in Hilda's bedroom with her husband.

"Allow me to condole with you all," she said contemptuously. "*We* are not to have any wedding—at least, we are not allowed to have the privilege of witnessing it! What do you think has happened? The bride has fainted——"

"What?" interrupted Hayward sharply, and his face grew pale.

"The bride—your friend, Mr. Hayward, and mine—a young person, whom as you

know, I have loaded with gifts and kindness, declines to be married before us. What do you think of that? Sir George alone is to be honoured by being present!"

"Is Miss Marston ill?" asked Hayward, with scarcely concealed agitation. "Surely if she is, the marriage ought to be put off."

"She has fainted, or pretended to faint for effect, most likely," continued Isabel, still in a rage; "and she makes this the excuse to exclude everyone from being present at her wedding."

"Won't we survive the disappointment?" said Captain Hugh Warrington, in his languid sarcastic way. "Suppose, Lady Hamilton, we have a game of billiards instead, and leave the loving young couple to enjoy themselves in their own way, in the company of Sir George?"

Captain Warrington looked with his handsome eyes into Isabel's face as he said this and smiled. He was thinking "what a

temper she has, but how confoundedly good-looking!" Isabel smoothed down her ruffled plumes as she met the guardsman's glance. She saw that he was only amused by her anger; and she did not care to amuse Captain Warrington.

"You are right," she said. "It is absurd to be angry about such people."

"It is always absurd to be angry," answered Captain Warrington; "but we are occasionally liable to it."

While this conversation was going on, Hayward left the room. Never had Isabel seemed so unlovely in his eyes as when she had spoken so contemptuously and heartlessly of Hilda's illness. He half guessed the cause of this sudden attack. The pale face at the window had been hers, and that face haunted him.

Presently he saw it again. Wandering restlessly about the house after leaving Isabel's presence, he was just about to cross the hall when he saw Hilda descending the staircase on her way to be married.

She never lifted her head and never saw him. She was clinging tightly to the arm of Jervis, and closely following them came Sir George. Hayward shrank back when he saw them. But he stood in the shadow and watched Hilda's face. It was very pale, and her lips were drawn tightly together. She wore her hat far on her face, and it hid the mark on her brow. She was dressed in a plain travelling dress, and had laid aside her bridal robes, as it had been arranged that she and Jervis were to start from the church door on their journey, and not return to the Park after the ceremony was over.

Some of the servants were loitering near the door where Hayward stood to see the bride come down. They had received orders from Sir George (through Ritson) not to remain in the hall as she did so, as Sir George thought it might annoy Hilda to be observed, and now Hayward overheard one or two of their comments.

"She looks more like going to a funeral

than a wedding," half-whispered one good-looking young housemaid to an older woman.

"Yes," answered the older woman to whom the young girl spoke; "yet, if you look in the priest's face, you'll see she's got a good man."

Hayward turned round and looked at the woman who said this, and his heart echoed the sentiment. "Yes, she had got a good man—God bless her, God bless her—" he thought, and with a very hot and restless heart he turned away. Then he remembered Mr. Irvine, and imagining that he and the other guests would have accompanied Lady Hamilton and Captain Warrington, to see the game of billiards that he had heard proposed, he proceeded to the billiard-room to seek them. As he went along the corridor that led to this room, he heard the click of the balls, and Isabel's low laugh. The door of the room was shut, but he opened it, and stood a moment in the doorway, unseen by the occupants.

No one was in the room but Lady Hamilton and Captain Warrington. They were leaning against the end of the billiard-table, with their cues resting on it, and over one of Isabel's jewelled hands Captain Warrington's was clasped. Hayward could not be mistaken. He stood there, and they never noticed him. They were talking and laughing, and Warrington was looking into Isabel's face with undisguised and not over respectful admiration. Then she looked up, and Hayward saw her glance. It was enough. That one look effectually cured his passion for Isabel. He had been weak, flattered, fluttering near the flame ; ready almost to forgive and forget what he knew of her past conduct ; but he never forgave or forgot that scene by the billiard table. With Solomon's bitter words in his heart about a fair woman without discretion, he closed the door and went away. What ! he had wasted his thoughts, and almost broken his heart, about a thing like this ? Truly, Mrs. Irvine's prophecy, made long ago

about Isabel Trevor at Sanda had come true. "She is a light woman," that grim lady had said, "and some day you men will know it;" and Hayward felt that he knew it now.

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On the evening of the same day our friend, the parson, from Sanda wrote a description of Hilda's wedding to his wife. He commenced his epistle in this fashion:—

"MY DEAR WIFE,—You asked me in your last to write a detailed account of Miss Hilda Marston's wedding, and I now hasten to do so. I must confess it was by no means an enlivening affair, and has left a feeling of oppression on my mind that is far from agreeable. Knowing that I can safely confide in your discretion, I will impart some observations that I made to you, although I feel sure that in future you will always boast how superior your discernment of character is to my own.



“But to return to the wedding. To begin with, it was a very wet day; to go on with, Hayward came down to breakfast looking absolutely miserable; and to end with, the unaccustomed luxuries that I imprudently indulged in during the day disagreed with me exceedingly.

“One person, however, looked perfectly happy during the early breakfast at Hayward’s, and this was the bridegroom. Mr. Jervis has a pleasant earnest face, and a sweet smile. He seemed quite content with the weather, and indeed with everything. It had been arranged that the small wedding party was to meet at the Park, and then walk to the church, and about a quarter to ten o’clock Mr. Jervis and myself started. Hayward made some excuse about not accompanying us, but said he would follow.

“A few minutes after our arrival at the Park, Lady Hamilton came into the room where we had been ushered. I know that, to entirely please you, I should here be

able to describe exactly how her ladyship was dressed. But I confess my inability to do this. However, she was in gay attire, and looked so beautiful that no mortal man could behold her without admiration. Be not jealous, my Martha, at this rapturous description, for, alas! I must add that your nature and homely charms are more to my taste, if the exceeding beauty with which Lady Hamilton is gifted has to be accompanied with the lightness—I may say indiscretion of manner—that characterizes her ladyship. Long ago I remember you making some disapproving remarks on her conduct, and, as I told you in the beginning of this letter, I feel sure that had you seen her yesterday you would have been full of complacency at your own discernment. There was a Captain Warrington present—a handsome man, with evidently a profound consciousness of the fact—and with this gentleman Lady Hamilton laughed and jested in a manner (I thought) highly



“Again I observed Hayward’s face during this announcement : pain, anger, and disappointment were expressed in every line of it. The dear lad was evidently suffering deeply, and made a hasty protest against the marriage taking place if the bride were ill. Then he left the room, and during the rest of the day I saw him no more.

“The wedding took place ; the bride and bridegroom started on their proposed journey from the church door, and about twelve o’clock we sat down to a sumptuous wedding breakfast, at which, however, Sir George Hamilton did not appear.

“Somehow this breakfast reminded me oddly of the ‘baked meats that coldly furnish forth the funeral feast.’ Of foolish talking and jesting there was enough, but, to my mind, the shadow of coming evil was over the whole affair. The ill omens in which the ancients believed oppressed me, or, perhaps the unaccustomed luxuries of which I unwisely partook ! Excuse so weak an attempt at merriment as this last

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allusion, for, in truth, I feel in no merry mood. I grieve about Hayward's unhappiness, and I grieve that this letter and the news it contains may cause both unhappiness and disappointment in the breast of our amiable Amelia. But it is better that she should know the truth. I feel sure that Hayward loveth her not as a man loveth the woman he would take to his bosom. To your maternal affection and judgment I confide the task of breaking this; and I feel sure that you will do so with due discretion.

"And now for the present, my dear Martha, farewell. I hope to return on Thursday; and if little Ned Marston is sufficiently recovered after Christmas, Mr. Jervis proposed that he should once more become my pupil. This is all my news; and with love to Amelia, I remain your affectionate husband,

"MATTHEW IRVINE."

This letter caused great disappointment



to Mrs. Irvine. This grim woman loved in her grim way the young man she had nursed back, as it were, to life, and had a strange sort of vicarious maternal feeling towards him, which longed for fuller expression. The natural consequence of this was that she most earnestly desired to marry her daughter to Hayward. She, however, with all her strange ways, was not devoid of common-sense. Much as she wished Hayward to love Amelia Shadwell, she was by no means sure that he did so. Thus we have seen that she directed her husband to "sound" (as she called it) the ex-tutor on the point; and the Rev. Matthew's letter, therefore, caused her considerable annoyance and pain.

Her heart sank when, about a quarter of an hour after she had received and read it, she heard the somewhat substantial feet of Amelia Shadwell ascending the staircase; and a moment or two later this robust, rosy young lady hastily entered the room where she was.

"You have heard from pa, ma?" she said, very red and breathless.

"Yes, Amelia Shadwell," replied Mrs. Irvine, solemnly.

"And he's all right, isn't he?" continued Amelia. "And—Mr. Hayward?"

"Is all wrong," answered Mrs. Irvine, shaking her head, and in her hollow tones.

"Wrong, ma?" repeated Amelia, looking in an alarmed manner at her mother.

"Yes, Amelia Shadwell," proceeded Mrs. Irvine in her deepest voice. "Hayward is all wrong. Some one that he wanted to marry has married some one else——"

But here Mrs. Irvine was interrupted by a shriek from Amelia.

"Wanted to marry!" cried poor Amelia. And the stout rosy girl turned absolutely pale. "No, ma, dear——surely no——"

"Yes, Amelia Shadwell," said Mrs. Irvine; and the grim gaunt woman rose and put her arms with some tenderness round her daughter. Perhaps she was thinking of the days when she had fallen

in love, too; and when her heart would have almost broken if the dark-eyed young curate, who had been her husband now so long, had turned away. At all events, she showed some motherly feeling to Amelia, drawing the girl close to her skeleton-like form.

"Don't cry," she said, "don't, Amelia Shadwell. Hayward isn't the only man in the world, and if he was none of them are worth half the tears that are shed for 'em! They are all mortal clay, and prone to evil!"

"But—I—thought Hayward cared for me, ma," sobbed Amelia, "and—after all the beef tea I made——"

"Don't grudge the beef tea," said Mrs. Irvine, whose heart still hankered after Hayward. "The young man needed it, and love neither comes nor goes at one's own bidding. I don't blame Hayward, Amelia Shadwell, and I don't blame you."

"But—he—sent the piano," wept Amelia.

"As a return, no doubt, for the beef tea," said Mrs. Irvine, grimly.

"If I thought so!" cried Amelia, lifting her head indignantly.

"It would make no difference," continued Mrs. Irvine. "The young man meant well, and you have no right to be angry because he meant nothing more."

"If I had only known," said Amelia, sighing, and beginning to dry her tears.

"That's just it," said Mrs. Irvine, "women can't ask, and so they are continually making fools of themselves. It's best to think that a young man means nothing until he really asks you to marry him."

Oh! Mrs. Irvine, Mrs. Irvine! In the days when the soft-hearted, soft-eyed young curate went to your father's house, did you act on this principle? The Rev. Matthew might have been unwedded, and all the little buried Shadwells and the substantial Amelia unborn, if you had then practised as you now preached.

But it is astonishing how the old forget the follies and errors of their youth. The wrinkled dowager shudders at the evil tales told of the young and fair, though she in her day perhaps caused some old woman to shake her head and heave a sanctimonious sigh. Thus Mrs. Irvine quite forgot how she had insisted upon marrying Amelia's kindly father. The mists of time had dimmed the memory of her girlhood's heart-aches and anxious pain.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEAD WOMAN'S RING.

MASSAM was always beautiful. In the spring time its sylvan glades and dells, fresh with their bright green verdure, seemed the haunts for the fabled naiads and driads of old. In the summer time the glinting sunbeams stole through the long green arcades of foliage, and fell dancing on the grass below, and on the golden gorse, and the wild hill-sides decked with ferns. Then came the autumn when the trees changed their hues, and the bushes and twining brambles bowed their fruit-laden heads. But before this season arrived, during the first year of Isabel's marriage, Massam was forsaken by its owners.

She had grown weary of it, and Sir George was weary of it. Not quite a year ago, when his love was young, he had wandered with Isabel along the winding tracts, carpeted with their mossy turf, which led through the beautiful woods of Massam.

Then he had listened to her flattering lowspoken words, fascinated yet half afraid. Now he walked with her no more. He had won his heart's desire, and it had turned to gall and bitterness. The beauty that had been a snare to him had been a snare to others also, and had brought anger, distrust, and jealousy into his home.

He had been a gloomy man before his marriage with Isabel, but he was more gloomy now. He was often harsh and bitter to her; and shortly after the birth of her child, and Hilda Marston's marriage, Isabel insisted that a change of air was absolutely necessary for her health.

In this her doctor coincided—in fact, with pretty pleading words Isabel had

asked him to coincide. Lady Hamilton required change, the great man from town told Sir George ; and as the season was now over in town, he recommended Brighton.

A furnished house was therefore taken at this watering place. It was taken for August ; and on the 1st of August Isabel and her infant son, and her suite of servants, left Massam, and arrived safely at the comfortable house which had been prepared for them.

Sir George did not go. He went to Scotland, intending to return to Massam on the commencement of partridge shooting ; and he told Isabel before they parted that it would be well if she also came back at the same time.

There was one tie still between Isabel and her husband, and this was their little son. Many a time Sir George would go up to the nursery, when no one but the nurses guessed he did so, and stand watching the cooing babe. He was a lovely child, "the young heir," as the nurses so proudly

called him. But Sir George said nothing about his heirship. He would stand looking at the baby boy, and then turn away with a sigh. But he was fond of the sturdy little fellow that would grasp his finger with a tiny clasp. Isabel also was rather proud if not fond of the child, and it was a link between them. "For the boy's sake I will bear with her if I can," thought Sir George. "For little Reggy's sake I will try to be civil," decided Isabel.

The baby had been called Reginald, after Isabel's father, Mr. Trevor. Isabel had proposed to call him after his own father; but Sir George had requested—nay, commanded—that this should not be. So his grandfather's name was given to him; and the old squire at Sanda felt very proud when he heard that it was to be so.

He sent Master Reginald a gorgeous gold drinking cup as a christening present, and a pompous letter of good wishes to his daughter on the same occasion. He

was not asked to the christening ; for Isabel had taken a great dislike to her father's young wife, and, of course, she could not invite her father without her. But she penned a civil letter back to the squire. She hoped that some day he would come to see her little Reggy, she wrote, and told him that he had no reason to be ashamed of his grandson.

Yet she felt anything but pleased when, on her arrival at Brighton, she found her father, his wife, and Patty Featherstone, were also staying there. She had intended to amuse herself, and she felt very much afraid that they would be in the way. They called upon her formally the day after her arrival, and the squire was apparently much delighted with his little grandson.

"I trust that we shall often see you, Isabel, as you are here," said the squire, as he kissed his daughter.

"Thank you, papa," replied Isabel ; but she mentally resolved at the same time

that she would see as little as possible of the family party.

Yet she had no just cause of anger against her father's wife. Lucinda did her duty to the old man, and tried to make him happy. If she were kind to her own people also, was she to blame? Isabel, at all events, thought so; and she accordingly behaved very coldly to Patty Featherstone during this first visit.

When people like, they can very easily avoid even their nearest relations. Isabel wished to avoid "those Featherstone girls," as she still called Patty and Lucinda; and Patty and Lucinda were quite sharp enough to see that this was the case.

Naturally they were annoyed, and naturally Mr. Trevor was annoyed. Then Isabel began to be talked about. Her great beauty, her husband's wealth, and her own careless disregard of appearances, were sufficient grounds for this, if there was nothing else. But, unfortunately, there was something else. Captain Warrington—a man

well known at Brighton—remarkable alike for his good looks and his money, was constantly to be seen in the beautiful Lady Hamilton's train. This was first whispered to Mrs. Trevor, her father's young wife; and then when Lucinda was never to be seen in public with her lovely daughter-in-law, it was openly commented on.

Whispers pass on in a mysterious way, and the whispers about Lady Hamilton were not long in reaching Massam. Hayward heard them from reckless Antony Featherstone, who laughed, and had his coarse joke at Sir George's expense on the occasion. As we know, Isabel's folly was now no news to Hayward. But he was angry, and said some sharp words to Mr. Featherstone, for the sake of Sir George.

"He should look better after her," said reckless Antony; and then he went away to spread the tale, and have his joke and laugh again.

When Lucinda first told her husband

that Isabel was talked of in Brighton about Captain Warrington, the Squire of Sanda was perfectly horrified. *His* daughter to be indiscreet in her conduct!—it was impossible, he argued. Then, when with his own eyes he saw how careless and defiant Isabel was of appearances, he at once determined to speak to her on the subject. He did so, and Isabel received his advice with scornful contempt.

“Did your youthful Lu,” she said, “send you on this errand? If so, my dear father, I may as well tell you that you are wasting your time.”

“Isabel,” said the squire, trembling partly with emotion and partly with anger, “have you lost all the respect that is due to me as your parent?”

“You have no right to interfere with me,” answered Isabel defiantly.

“For your dead mother’s sake—for your husband’s sake,” urged the squire, “surely you will never allow your name to be bandied about with this young man’s?”

"What do I owe my husband?" answered Isabel, passionately. "He treats me with utter contempt and indifference."

"Then it is your own fault," retorted Mr. Trevor. "When Sir George married you, he was, I am sure, deeply attached to you."

"It did not last, then," said Isabel; and in this reckless spirit she absolutely rejected her father's advice.

"Then I shall speak to your husband," said the squire, rising angrily to leave; and he actually contemplated writing Sir George on the subject; but his wife persuaded him not to do so.

"She will not stay long," said Lucinda, good-naturedly. "Don't make any further breach between them, if you can possibly help it. Foolish as Isabel is, I cannot believe that she will allow her vanity to carry her too far."

But though her father gave Sir George no hint of Isabel's indiscretion, Antony Featherstone was not so reticent.



"You should look after that handsome wife of yours, Sir George," he said in his careless reckless way, a few days after Sir George returned from Scotland. "I hear she's turning the heads of half the young fellows in Brighton, and that good-looking guardsman's—the parson's relation—among the number."

Sir George gave no reply to this impertinence. He looked with his cold haughty gaze at Mr. Featherstone's flushed red face, and then, without a word, he turned away. But this careless speech left its mark; and Sir George acted upon it. He wrote, in fact, at once to Isabel, and requested her immediately to return.

She replied civilly to this letter. She would like to stay a week longer, the sea air was doing the baby so much good—and so on. But Sir George was not to be beguiled. He started for Brighton on the morning that he received his wife's answer to his letter, and, to Isabel's surprise and consternation, arrived there the

same evening, when Isabel was dressing to go to a concert at the Aquarium.

"I have come to take you home," he said, after coldly saluting her.

"But why?" said Isabel. "Reggy is so well here—and as papa is here——"

"Have you seen much of your father?" asked Sir George; and Isabel slightly coloured at the question.

"Not so much, of course," she answered, "as I would have done if the Featherstones had not been with him."

"If you mean your father's wife, I hear she makes him a most excellent one," said Sir George.

"Of course," said Isabel, throwing back her head, "you are sure to say everything that will be disagreeable to me."

But Sir George made no answer to this petulant reply. His eyes by accident had fallen on Isabel's rings, which were lying on a table near, where she had carelessly thrown them when she had commenced dressing for the concert. There were some

half-dozen of them, and they were all diamond ones. It was, indeed, one of Isabel's last fancies to wear nothing but diamonds, and among the sparkling circlets Sir George's eyes were fixed intently upon one.

It was the great heavy diamond hoop that had been on the dead woman's hand whose body had been brought to shore by Hayward at Sanda. Isabel had kept this ring against her father's wishes, but she had never worn it at Massam. She was afraid, in fact, that Sir George would not allow her to retain it if he knew where it came from. At Brighton, however, she had constantly worn it. It was indeed a beautiful ring, remarkable for the size of the brilliant stones that it contained, and for the inscription on the inner rim, which, under the circumstances, had seemed so sad to Hilda Marston.

Suddenly—before Isabel had noticed that his attention was attracted by it—Sir George lifted this ring in his hand, and

the next moment, in a voice sharpened by some strange agony, he asked :

"Isabel, where did you get this ring?"

She looked up at this, and when she saw which ring it was, she slightly frowned.

"I don't know," she said, with affected carelessness; "at a jeweller's, I suppose."

"What jeweller's?" asked Sir George, in the same strange voice; and he nervously turned the ring, and read the words engraved on the inner rim as he spoke, "*To my beloved.*"

He read these words, but not aloud; and then with something between a sob and cry, he sprang forward and grasped Isabel's hand.

"Tell me," he said, "for God's sake, tell me, Isabel, where did you get this ring?"

His agitation was unmistakable, his face almost convulsed, and a sudden suspicion at once entered Isabel's mind.

"Why do you want to know?" she said, trying to free her hand. "Did you give

it to some beloved one, then? Is it a souvenir of some lost love?"

She spoke these words half tauntingly, and with a curse Sir George dropped her hand.

"Woman," he said facing her, "answer me. Where, and by what means, did you gain possession of this ring?"

"It was taken from a dead woman's hand," answered Isabel, defiantly. "And what, may I ask, was the dead woman to you?"

At this moment Isabel's maid, Ritson, who did not know that Sir George had arrived, entered the room, and without seeing him, addressed Isabel:

"My lady," she said, "Captain Warrington is here——" Then she paused, for she suddenly had perceived that Sir George was present.

"I am ready," said Isabel, and she went to the table and put on her other rings, looking defiantly at Sir George the while. "Where is my cloak?" she continued,

speaking to Ritson ; and then, as her maid placed it on her shoulders., she once more addressed her husband.

“ I am going to a concert at the Aquarium,” she said ; “ will you go ? Captain Warrington is here, and his sister, Mrs. Woodford. I am going with them.”

“ You can go,” answered Sir George, in a low fierce tone, after a moment’s hesitation ; and Isabel, with a glance at her maid to follow her, drew her cloak around her, and quitted the room.

“ Get him out of the room as quickly as possible,” she whispered to Ritson, as soon as they were on the staircase. And the maid, after seeing her lady downstairs, where she was joined by Captain Warrington, returned to the dressing-room, where Sir George was still standing.

“ Ritson,” he said, speaking to her harshly and sternly, “ do you know anything about this ring ? ” And he held the diamond hoop towards her as he spoke.

“ Nothing, Sir George,” answered Ritson,

positively and truthfully. There were other rings that Isabel wore that Ritson did know something of, but not of this. Isabel, in fact, had never confided to her maid how this ring had come into her possession.

"Do you know how long she has had it?" asked Sir George, in the same stern voice.

"Ever since I have been with my lady," said Ritson; "but she never wore it until lately. I have seen it, however, frequently in her jewel-case at Massam."

"That will do," said Sir George. "Give me your lady's keys, and then leave the room."

"But, Sir George——" hesitated the confidential maid.

"I insist upon your obeying me," said Sir George. "Give me the keys."

"I—I haven't them with me," murmured Ritson, tremblingly.

"Then bring me a hammer and a file," said Sir George; and the frightened woman

left the room, and as she went down stairs she decided to send a messenger to recall her lady.

In the meanwhile Sir George was looking around at Isabel's possessions. He would learn how she got this ring, he determined. There must be some clue in her desk, or in the locked drawers of her toilet table; and as his heart was wrung with great agony and doubt, he made up his mind at once to search for it.

Ritson did not return with the keys, but Sir George was a strong man, and slight locks are easily broken. He waited a moment or two for the lady's maid, and then rang the room bell violently, and in a minute or so the butler (who had accompanied Isabel from Massam) answered the summons.

It was known downstairs by this time that something had happened. Ritson, with scared looks, had herself hurried out to go to the concert to seek her lady, and the butler was, therefore, half pre-

pared for the stern expression that his master wore when he answered the dressing-room bell.

"Where is Ritson?" asked Sir George.
"Why has she not brought me the keys I ordered her to bring?"

"Ritson has just gone out, Sir George," replied the butler.

"Then bring me at once a hammer and a file."

This order the butler obeyed, and stood listening outside the door of the dressing-room, while the crash of wood-work and the wrenching open of locks was heard from within. The man stood with bated breath. He knew that probably some terrible discovery would follow this forcible opening of Lady Hamilton's locked repositories. Her servants had watched and commented upon her conduct now for long. These polite, respectful, household spies knew now, therefore, that a crisis had come. The butler heard the wrenching of the locks, and then went down and told his fellows what was

going on upstairs. He told them at least that Sir George was breaking open my lady's locks; but he could not tell them of all the dark passions that were raging in Sir George's breast as he did so.

With the hammer and file in his hands, and with his black brows knitted and his forehead wet with dew, Sir George stood. He had first forced open the top drawer of Lady Hamilton's dressing-table. In this, lying on a confused collection of female vanities, he found a short open note. Sir George took it up and read it, and then, with a muttered execration, dashed it on the floor.

But this note was one of many. They were all written in one handwriting, and as Sir George read them, there was no longer any doubt in his mind of his wife's guilt. He had known before that she was a base and perjured woman, but he knew now that she had forfeited all right to the shelter of his roof.

He took out the letters one by one.

Then, with a bitter curse, he laid them on a table near, and went on with his search. He was not seeking evidence of his wife's sin now. He was seeking for what he had remained there to seek—some clue as to how Isabel had become possessed of the dead woman's ring.

But he sought in vain. Among all her letters, amongst all her secrets, there was not one word to unravel this one. Yet Sir George could not be mistaken in the ring. This ring had been in his hands before. It had been given as a token of a love long dead. It had come from beneath the wave as an avenging sign. It was a symbol of his own guilt and sin ; and in seeking for the knowledge of how Isabel had become possessed of it, he had learned that his wife was no better than a castaway !

The room was all in confusion. He had flung the contents of her desk, her trunks, and her drawers carelessly aside as he searched them. Her jewels, her love-

letters, her lover's gifts, all were strewn around, when suddenly he heard a light and faltering step approach the door.

Then the handle slowly turned, and, pale and trembling, Isabel appeared on the threshold.

She grew more afraid when she saw him. The fierce dark light in his eyes, and the concentrated passion of his expression, filled her heart with dread.

"Come here," he said, in a savage undertone, looking at her; but she shrank back.

"Don't be afraid, I'll not murder you," he continued, in the same passion-stifled voice. "Come here; I want you to answer one question before I see your face no more!"

Then Isabel approached him, and fell grovellingly on her knees. She saw it was all discovered. Her sin, her folly, her falseness, were all known now; but she thought she might move him for the child's sake.

"For Reggy's sake," she said, with half a sob, looking up into his stern, pale face, "for the boy's sake, don't turn me away!"

"He will be better with no mother," answered Sir George in a hoarse voice.

"Don't say that——" she urged; but Sir George stopped her with an imperative gesture.

"Tell me," he said, "if your false lips can speak the truth—tell me, where did you get this ring?"

"At Sanda," said Isabel, who was too much terrified to refuse to answer. "A woman's body was brought on shore there by Mr. Hayward, and she had on several rings. That was one of them. Papa got them to take care of, as lord of the manor, and I asked him to allow me to wear that one. This is the truth."

"At Sanda!" murmured Sir George, as if he were thinking aloud. "At Sanda—truly my sin has found me out!"

"What was this woman to you?" asked

. Isabel, gaining now a little courage and rising.

“Not faithless like you, at least!” answered Sir George, again looking at her with withering scorn. “But it is all over,” he continued, “my roof shall shelter you no more, and the name that you have dishonoured shall be taken from you.”

“Be it so, then,” said Isabel, drawing herself up to her full height, and facing him. “I am not a woman to ask a man to forgive me twice.” And with these last words she turned away, and went out from her husband’s presence.

CHAPTER IX.

NEMESIS.

A HEAVY thunderstorm broke over Massam the day after this dark and miserable meeting between Sir George and Lady Hamilton took place.

In the midst of it, amid the blinding rain and the fierce flashes of forked lightning, Sir George, pale, travel-stained, and visibly disturbed, rode up to the entrance of Combe Lodge, and asked to see Hayward.

He was at home, and at once went to meet Sir George ; holding out his hand and looking at him in great surprise.

“ Sir George ! ” he said, leading the way into the library, “ when did you return ? ”

"Just now," answered Sir George. "I came to you at once."

"And on such a day!" said Hayward.

"It is a fitting day," replied Sir George, gloomily, "for the tale I have to tell. Hayward," he added the next moment, "why—did you never tell me—of this unhappy woman—whose body you rescued from the sea?"

Sir George's looks, his unmistakable agitation, his broken and passionate accents, all alarmed Hayward, and filled him with a vague sense of coming ill.

"What has happened?" asked Hayward.

"If you mean the poor woman whose body was washed near to the shore at Sanda——"

"Yes," said Sir George, excitedly, as Hayward hesitated; "I mean the woman whose dead body was cast up from beneath the wave as a witness against me. What do you think I am, Hayward," he continued, pacing the room with rapid steps. "Shall I tell you? This hand," he went

on darkly, holding out his right hand, "sent that woman to her doom!"

"My God!" exclaimed Hayward.

"Listen," continued Sir George, passionately, "it is a tale of shame and pain! I have come to confess to you. The one man whose friendship and regard I have sought will turn from me with shrinking abhorrence to-day!"

"That can never be!" said Hayward, warmly, advancing and holding out his hand to Sir George. "Whatever you have done, nothing will change my feelings to you now."

This assurance seemed a sort of consolation to Sir George's miserable heart. He took Hayward's hand. He looked with his dark sunken eyes yearningly into the young man's face.

"I—tried," he said in a broken voice, "tried to do right. My mad passions mastered me—not meaningly did I strike the fatal blow."

"Then God, who judges not as men

judge," said Hayward, "knows it. Dear Sir George," he continued, "I earnestly entreat you to take some consolation from this thought in this unhappy hour."

For a moment or two Sir George did not speak after this appeal; and then, with more composure of manner than he had hitherto evinced, he once more looked up and addressed Hayward.

"I will tell you the tale," he said, "the tale of a wrecked life. To do this I must go back to the time when I was a young man of some seven or eight and twenty, for until then things had all gone fairly smooth with me. I had a good mother, and was fond of her, and she tried all she could to make my life happy. But about this age I took a restless fit. I grew weary and somewhat jaded of the easy and luxurious routine in which I spent my days. I wished for change, and I determined to make a lengthened tour over Europe. I did this, wandering from country to country, and about six months

after I left home I found myself in Spain. It is a wretched story, remember, Hayward, that I have to tell you—wretched in the beginning—more wretched in the end!”

“Yes, I understand,” said Hayward, as Sir George paused.

“It was at Seville, then,” continued Sir George, “that I formed the unhappy connection that blighted and finally ruined my life. In the house in which I was staying there was a young Spanish girl, beautiful in the dark and passionate beauty of her race, and an unfortunate attachment sprang up between us. She was the niece of the proprietor of the house I was in, and for some weeks I was constantly thrown with her. She was ignorant, and impetuous, and I was selfish and unthinking. Her low birth made her no fitting mate for me, and in an evil hour I asked Catalina Mendoza to leave her home. Hayward, from that day I was a hampered and unhappy man. The poor

girl reproached me, and my conscience reproached me, and daily association with an uneducated and narrow-minded woman quickly wore away the feelings that her beauty had excited in my heart."

"I can easily believe that," said Hayward.

"Yet I tried not to show this," said Sir George. "We lived together year after year, and travelled from city to city, and I tried—so heaven help me!—to make her life as happy as I could. But she was always urging me to marry her, and this, for my mother's sake—for my pride's sake, perhaps—I refused to do. At last she told me she was about to become a mother, and on her knees implored me not to let our innocent child be born with a brand upon its name. Then I did for the unborn babe what I would not do for the mother—I married her, and our child was born after the ceremony."

"What!" exclaimed Hayward quickly,

"then you have an elder legitimate child to Reggy?"

"Yes, I drowned the voice of conscience for a wanton!" answered Sir George, bitterly. "Call her by no other name, for what is she? Look at these letters—read the evidence of a vile woman's shame."

As Sir George said these last words he placed in Hayward's hands the letters he had taken from Isabel's locked drawers on the previous day. Hayward opened one, glanced at the signature, and placed the packet on a table near.

"I understand," he said. "These are letters that have been addressed by Captain Warrington to Lady Hamilton?"

"Yes!" said Sir George, with passionate emphasis. "For this false woman's sake I hid away the child that is the legal heir to Massam! But I have not told you all—I have not told you of the dark deed that made me free to marry Isabel Trevor; I have not told you how the ring—the

pledge of a love long dead—was cast up from beneath the wave to me in vengeance. Hayward, the hand of God has smitten me—the dead woman's ring has appeared as a witness against me !”

“And this unhappy woman,” said Hayward, as Sir George paused, utterly overcome with emotion, “that I swam out, and brought to shore at Sanda, was your ——”

“She was my wife,” said Sir George, darkly and gloomily ; “the low-born wife of whom I was ashamed, and of whom I had wearied long ago ! Unhappy she was to bear that name—unhappy indeed to be wedded to a man who loved her not, and whose thoughts and feelings were utterly dissimilar to her own. It was a wretched marriage. As soon as she found she had any legal claim upon me, she ceased, or appeared to cease, to have any regard for me. We quarrelled constantly, and a vile habit that she had learnt of taking too much wine added to my aversion and disgust. For five long years we were

married, and during all these, and during the five years which preceded them, I never returned to England. I could not bear to tell my mother my secret. I could not bring a woman who was not fit to do so, to share her home, and so I remained away. At last my poor mother died, and I was almost compelled to return. But I did not mean to do so for long. I requested Hannaway to purchase me a yacht—the ill-fated *Endymion*—you understand now, do you not? I am drawing near the end of my miserable tale.”

“And this yacht was lost at Sanda?” asked Hayward.

“Yes. We sailed from Havre, and were cruising about the Scottish coast, when one night—O God! I cannot tell it—I cannot tell it!” and Sir George paused, and covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

“Do not do so, then, dear Sir George,” urged Hayward. “Spare yourself this terrible pain.”

"No, I will go on," said Sir George, in a broken and hollow voice. "I will tell you how, in a moment of mad passion, I struck the woman I had sworn to love and cherish! It was at night, as I have said," he continued, struggling with his bitter emotion, "a moonlight night, and she was sitting carelessly on the bulwark of the vessel, taunting me, as usual, with my meanness and cowardice in not taking her to my English home. We got to high words. In a moment—unthinkingly, passionately—I struck her a blow; and the next, O God! O God! she reeled over, and fell—before I could put out my hand to save her—into the sea!"

"O, Sir George!" said Hayward, deeply moved.

"We stopped the yacht," went on Sir George in stifled accents. "The boats were got out, and hour after hour we lingered near the fatal spot. But she was gone! As she fell overboard she gave a cry. That weird death cry was heard by the

men. I saw this in their faces—I saw them muttering and whispering together—and I knew they suspected, if they were not sure of, the truth. This went on for days. I was afraid to go into port, lest they should denounce me as a murderer; afraid to ask them what they knew. Then came the storm. Amid that raging tempest their tongues were loosed. As the ship heeled over, and the end came, I heard them reviling and cursing me! ‘This is for sailing with a murderer!’ one man cried as the ship went down. Hayward, that dead man’s face came back to me! I was called upon to identify at the inquest the very man whose last words and looks of hate I had heard and seen.”

“How terrible! how terrible!” cried Hayward.

“You know the rest now,” continued Sir George, after pausing for a moment or two, when he appeared totally unable to proceed. “You know how I remained

at Sanda after the wreck, and how the fatal beauty of Isabel Trevor snared me, as it had snared you! Truly and deeply I loved her! No other woman had ever been to me what she was, and yet I struggled with my feelings—telling myself that I had no right to form new ties—and that the unhappy Catalina's child was the legal successor to my property and my name. But I was rich," added Sir George, with a bitter ring in his deep voice, "I was worth winning, and she knew her power! It ended in my acting with dishonest cowardice. I resolved for her sake to suppress my legitimate heir, and rear him as if he were illegitimate. There was but one person in England who half knew, half guessed, the secret of my first marriage. This was Hannaway. But he was a man who meddled little with things that did not concern him; and though he knew of my connection with Catalina, and of the child's birth, he was not, I think, sure of the marriage. But mark how mysteri-

ously my sins have found me out. When Hannaway's death happened, I hurried to his house, to secure the secret of the child's existence from prying eyes. He had sent money to the person the boy was with from time to time, and I knew the receipts would be among his papers. In searching for these I learnt that she for whom I had done all this was utterly unworthy of my love! Until I read her letters to Hannaway, I had loved Isabel—yes, loved her too well! These letters turned my heart to gall. She had never loved me—had jibed and jested about me from the very first, to this man who was almost a stranger to her. Truly, from that day the iron entered into my soul. The remorse that has always pursued me seems now greater than I can bear."

"Do not say so," said Hayward earnestly. "It was a terrible misfortune, but the fatal blow was an unintentional one."

"Yes," answered Sir George, gloomily; "but many and many a time before I

had wished that she were dead, and I was free. But now—could I recall her back to life—I would die a thousand deaths to have the power to do so!”

As Sir George said this, he sank back on a chair, completely overcome. The storm was still raging outside, and the lurid light made the whole scene more impressive and tragic. The conscience-stricken man, whose wealth was nothing to him, whose love had turned to hate, and whose sin had found him out, seemed utterly overwhelmed and broken down. In vain Hayward tried to comfort him. What, indeed, could he say? Nothing, as Sir George truly told him; for in Sir George’s heart there was the bitterness of death!

CHAPTER X.

A SCANDAL.

ON the night when Isabel left her husband's presence, after all her crooked ways, all her folly, and all her sin had come to light, she hastily summoned her maid Ritson, and after writing a few pencilled lines, placed them in the woman's hand.

"Take these," she said, "to Captain Warrington; he is waiting outside. Tell him to get a cab, and I will join him at once."

Then the woman spoke up tremblingly and eagerly, "Oh, my lady," she said, "don't go. Think a moment what you are throwing away. Go to your father's; and in the morning, perhaps, Sir George——"

"No," said Isabel, passionately, as Ritson paused; "do you think I would go there, and whine and beg for protection from Lucinda Featherstone? No," she repeated, "he has done it, I will not go back—I will not go back!"

"For Reggy's sake, for your little boy's sake!" urged the woman; and for a moment a more womanly look than the hard and defiant one which Isabel's face wore passed over it.

She paused. The God-given, motherly instinct, which in her cold heart was so slight, so overgrown, and overshadowed by other feelings, for a moment asserted its sway. Then came back darker thoughts, the angry passions; and the child's little tender touch was forgotten.

"It is too late," she said. "Take this note—tell him I shall come. And, Ritson, you stay behind and pack the jewels—I am not going, at least, to leave them." And Isabel gave a little bitter and defiant laugh.

So she threw it all away! Her good name, her young child's love, the world's respect and honour, and higher and holier blessings still, of which Isabel had never thought. And for what? Let us, oh reader, for a moment follow Ritson's footsteps, and see how Isabel's decision was received by the man for whom she had sacrificed so much.

The lamplights were shining on Captain Warrington's handsome face, who was pacing backwards and forwards in the streets below as Ritson approached him. But there was a frown on that handsome face. Captain Warrington hated scenes and exposures; and though he walked not in the strait and narrow way, he had never made himself very conspicuous in the broad one. He was, therefore, annoyed and disconcerted.

"I hope she's not going to get me into any confounded trouble," he was thinking; and as the thought passed through his mind; he saw Ritson approaching him.

He knew this woman well. She had carried his notes and his love-letters—the notes and the love-letters were all now lying open before Sir George—and he therefore advanced eagerly to meet her. “Well,” he said, “has there been a row?”

The woman’s answer was to place Isabel’s note in his hand, and as he read the few pencilled lines by the lamplight that she had sent him, a curse broke from his lips.

“What!” he cried with passionate anger; and then, with bitten lips and knitted brow, he stood silent to hear the woman’s tale—the tale that left him burdened with a woman for whom he had no love and no respect.

The next day there was a scandal in Brighton. The beautiful Lady Hamilton had eloped, and everyone was eager to tell his or her neighbour the news. Then the scandal spread to town, and crept into the “society” papers, and was talked of and laughed about in the Clubs. Captain

Hugh Warrington was a man well known, and Lady Hamilton was a beauty; and so the affair made quite a sensation. By-and-by the story came to Yorkshire, and tongues were loosened, and tales were told that had only been whispered or suspected before. The dead lawyer, Mr. Hannaway, lying in his untimely grave, once more was talked of and commented on. This person had seen that, another something else. Lady Hamilton had flung away her fair fame, and everyone now was ready to help to blacken it.

In the meanwhile, at the Park, the gloomy master passed his miserable days. It seemed now to Sir George (as he had told Hayward) that the hand of God had smitten him. A settled and profound melancholy oppressed him. The remorse that he had never succeeded in driving from his mind, even during his passionate infatuation for Isabel Trevor, now returned with ten-fold force. He was for ever haunted by his hidden crime. The woman

who had loved him—the ignorant, once beautiful, Spanish woman — was now bitterly revenged !

But he did all he could now to repair his wrong. He went up to town with Hayward a few days after he had told him his dark story, and saw his lawyer, and gave directions for a new will. At the same time he made a formal declaration of his first marriage, and instructed his lawyer how, in the event of his death, this marriage could be proved. Then he wrote to the Padre at Seville, who had charge of his till now unacknowledged son, and desired him to prepare the boy to come to England.

“He is my heir,” he said to Hayward ; and Hayward, by his wish, started for Seville about a month after Lady Hamilton had left her husband, for the purpose of bringing this Spanish youth to his English home.

After Hayward was gone, Sir George’s gloom and remorse grew darker and deeper.

He had pressed on, with all the influence that his wealth and position could command, his projected divorce from Isabel. But he had to wait his turn. Other men, and other women too, were striving to be free from broken or dishonoured bonds, and "the Hamilton case" was one of many.

So, alone—with some of the bitterest feelings that the human heart can 'bear for ever near him—Sir George lived on at Massam. It was a gloomy picture: a man beset by the darkest passions of our nature, and with no hope or comfort on which to lay his hand. Even his love for his little son was poisoned by the memory of its mother. The child had golden hair, and the hue of the little silken curls ever reminded Sir George of Isabel.

With morbid self-torture, Sir George now constantly wore the dead woman's ring. He believed that it had been cast up by the waves as an avenging sign to him,

and as a token that his sin had found him out. Conceive, then, this crime-haunted man sitting in his stately home, with his sunken eyes fixed on the glittering pledge of a love that had so drear an end! No wonder that his brain reeled at times, and that his reason threatened to give way.

One day, when the dark spirit was upon him, the idea entered into his mind to go to Sanda to see the grave of the unhappy woman he once had loved. He went—wandering in that seaside churchyard among the simple gravestones that recorded many an untimely end. The cruel sea whose waves were breaking on the rough brown rocks below had swallowed up the bread-winner, the father, the beloved son. All around Sir George read the tragic tale. But among all the graves, among all the tombstones, he saw nothing to tell him of the one he sought. At last he went to Mr. Irvine, and in faltering, almost unintelligible words, asked where

the woman's body lay that had been brought to shore by Mr. Hayward.

The parson knew the spot, and was ready and glad to repeat the tale.

"The poor soul had tossed many days in the sea," he said; and, little guessing the agony he was inflicting, he proceeded to describe all the details of the dead woman's appearance to the unhappy Sir George.

Then he pointed out the green hillock where she lay after her long wanderings.

"Aye," said the parson, "she sleeps here! Where, I wonder, poor sea waif, are her friends and kindred—where, perhaps the husband of her love?"

With knitted brow and bitten lips Sir George stood by and heard. Where? It seemed to his maddened ears at that moment that a mocking laugh rang in the air. Where? Was it some devil that laughed, or was Sir George going mad? Almost with a cry of terror, he turned from the grave; and the parson, in some surprise and dismay, followed him. Was

Sir George ill? he asked; and he urged him in his genial way to return to rest and refresh himself at the Parsonage.

But in brief harsh words Sir George refused. No, he must go—go at once; he said. He scarcely answered the kind parson's farewells. He did not know how anxiously the good man looked in his face as he rung his cold and nerveless hand.

All the way on his journey home he heard the sea breaking on the rocks at Sanda. Then, as wave after wave broke with melancholy cadence on his ears, he knew he was going mad.

But he regained his self-control before he reached Massam. He went straight into the library when he got there, and found a letter lying there addressed to him from Hayward, in Spain. Hayward had found the boy, he told Sir George; and when he received this letter, he and the young Juan, Sir George's Spanish son, would be on their way to England.

"He is a handsome lad," wrote Hayward, "with dark fiery eyes, and an imperious manner." As Sir George read these words, he seemed to see again the beautiful and passionate face of the unhappy mother, as he had first seen it in the bright days of her girlish love; long years had passed since then. The ardent love had first grown cold, and then had turned to weariness and hate. But Sir George forgot all this now. He only saw the young Spanish girl, with her dark eyes fixed on his, and felt her rosy lips in their first fond kiss of love!

And the boy—how could he meet the boy?—he began asking himself. "Where is my mother?" he would say, "*Where?*"

As Sir George repeated this last word again and again, he was conscious that his self-control was once more passing away, and that the gloomy terrors of a madhouse awaited him.

"But I shall never go there," he decided; and so deliberately and determi-

nately he made up his mind to end his miserable life.

He took out a pistol and loaded it, and then, with heavy weary footsteps, he went upstairs to kiss the little child. The baby-boy was asleep, and made no sign; but the nurse saw that the stern-eyed gloomy man had left a tear on the rosy dimpled cheek.

"His bad wife has broken his heart," said the head nurse indignantly, after he was gone. "I said how it would end, when her ladyship, indeed! could not bear to hear the little angel cry just after he was born!"

After Sir George left the nursery he went out silently into the night. It was bleak and wet and the wind was sighing through the trees in the deserted park, and the grass was dank and slippery. But Sir George noticed none of these things. He was about to take a leap in the dark; to begin a journey to an unknown land! So he heard the wind, but he heeded it

not, and the rain fell in great heavy drops on his face, but he never wiped them away. He knew what he was doing, but he knew also that this power would not last for long. He felt, in fact, that he was going mad, and that his mind was giving way from the prolonged and terrible strain that had fallen upon it.

There was a long green arcade of trees in the park, where, in his early manhood, he had often lain and dreamed in the summer time a young man's romantic dreams. They seemed to pass before his mental vision now, when they had all ended in failure and in shame. He had done not good, but evil, he kept repeating to himself; and so, despairingly and darkly, he went to his self-condemned doom.

He never uttered a prayer. How could he pray? Ah! poor soul, let us then pray, when that death shot rang through the still woods, and when with a wild cry Sir George fell quivering on the grass.

There was no one to receive his last breath—no one to see his eyes grow dim or close them. He died where he fell—beneath the green arcade where he had dreamed his young dreams, and which waved over his still form after his wasted and unhappy life was done.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BITTER END.

WHEN the morning broke, and the birds began to stir among the trees in the woods of Massam, and the hares and rabbits to peep out their brown heads from the misty undergrowth, a hurried footstep came stealthily along beneath the green arcade of trees where Sir George's body lay.

He was a hunted man, this new-comer; hunted, desperate. He had been a clerk, and had tried to rob his master, and the police were closely on his track. But he knew the woods of Massam, and he had lain hidden there for days; and now, desperate, hungry, almost penniless, he was

about to try in the early dawn to make his escape.

Suddenly, as he half ran, half tramped along, he came to the spot where Sir George lay dead. Even amid his own terror he stopped at the ghastly sight. The white face and the half open eyes fixed upon the sky were terrible enough to make him, for a few moments at least, forget his fear. He knelt down and opened Sir George's waistcoat to feel if his heart were still. As he did so, the clink of gold fell upon his ears. The penniless starving man started at the sound. A second glance convinced him that Sir George was dead, and a second thought that he might as well make the best of the chance that had fallen in his way.

So he took Sir George's gold with his trembling hands. He took also the dead man's watch, his pocket-book, and his outer coat, and then fled away down the winding paths of the woods, as he had fled before.

And all the day passed, and no other footstep drew near. The sun rose up and shone, and the birds sang, and the sun went down, and the birds were silent, and still Sir George lay there alone. There was no one, in fact, who dared to make any inquiries about him. He had gone out, and left no word; and who was he accountable to? Thus, at least, the servants argued, and thus for two days Sir George's body lay in the woods. But on the third it was discovered. A young keeper going his rounds in the early morning had his attention attracted by the whines and agitation of his dog. He turned out of his way to see what was disturbing the intelligent creature, and came upon Sir George, lying dead.

Robbed and murdered. This was the verdict of all who heard the tale. Everything valuable about Sir George's person was gone, and the pistol also with which he had destroyed his life had disappeared. There was a hunted man who knew better,

but the hunted man very naturally was silent. All the country round was searched, and the woods trampled by many feet, but no clue was ever found. The hunted man had two days' start, and he made good use of them, and of the gold he had taken from Sir George.

So when Hayward and the young Spanish boy reached Massam, this tale of murder was told them. Hayward was utterly overcome by the news, and overwhelmed with grief about the death of Sir George. All the way home this young man had been promising himself how he would devote his life to comfort and console his friend. He only knew Sir George's dark secret. He only, when he heard the tale of murder, felt doubt as well as grief in his heart.

He went up alone to the gorgeously and gloomily-decked room where the remains of the rich man lay in state. Sir George was in his coffin, but it was yet unclosed; and the stern, handsome, white face looked stern and handsome still.

But he was not unmourned. Hayward knelt down and kissed the cold brow and hand of his dead friend. Then in heartfelt and broken accents he began to pray. Oh ! could he have known of the wild agony that had wrung Sir George's heart before he had gone out to die ! But he knew enough ; knew of the wearing remorse, of the passionate disappointment and pain.

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Before they carried him away, Hayward took up the boy, young Juan, to see his father's face. The lad showed very little sign of emotion. Somehow there was a sense of wrong in his heart, and he had already guessed the truth of the stain on his mother's name. He was a proud, handsome youth, with dark eyes, and, as Hayward had written to Sir George, with haughty and imperious ways. So he stood and looked at his dead father ; and then, with undimmed eyes, turned away.

But Hayward was a true mourner. With a pale, haggard, face he followed his friend to the grave. In that long procession he alone knew the truth of the sad life that now was done. But before the day was over, many knew of Sir George's first marriage, and how the young Spanish boy claimed to be his heir.

After the ceremony was over, the London lawyer, who had come down for the occasion, read aloud Sir George's last will. In this he formally made a declaration of his first marriage with Catalina Mendoza, and of the birth of their son. To this son he left Massam, and the chief of the princely fortune that he had inherited. But he left also a large fortune to his infant son Reginald; and to his "dear friend Philip Hayward," he bequeathed the sum of twenty-five thousand pounds, and left him also the guardianship of his two sons; beseeching them always to look upon him with respect and affection.

With surprised glances the funeral guests

looked at each other after the will was read. There had always been a mystery about Sir George's life, they were thinking—so this was the mystery—this Spanish marriage and this Spanish son. And what a fortunate young fellow this Hayward had been, was the next thought that occurred to some of those present, who ruefully reflected how convenient it would have been if Sir George Hamilton had left such a sum of ready money to them. But there was no one there who made any dispute about the will. Mr. Trevor was not present, though he had been invited to be so; but the proud, vain old man's heart was almost broken by his daughter's shame.

At first he could not believe it. "It is a lie, a horrible invention!" he cried. But when all doubt was over, and when the proposed divorce between Sir George and Lady Hamilton was openly talked of, the squire bowed his grey head, and told his wife that he thought it would kill him.

In vain Lucinda tried to comfort him. The squire's vanity was one of his strongest characteristics, and his daughter's misconduct had wounded his vanity to the very quick. So when the news of Sir George's tragic end reached Sanda, the old man would not move in the matter. He refused to go to the funeral when asked to do so, and thus there was no one present who had any right or authority to resist the will. Young Juan Mendoza, therefore, who had hitherto borne his mother's maiden name, walked out from the room where his unhappy father's last testament was read Sir Juan Hamilton, the owner of the broad lands of Massam, and apparently in undisputed possession of his new wealth.

It was a great change of fortune also to Hayward. Twenty-five thousand pounds, and one thousand a year for managing the property, made him seem almost a rich man. But he felt a very sad one. He had learned to care very deeply for Sir George ; and his miserable story, his re-

morse, and his bitter gloom, had filled the young man's heart with intense pity and sympathy for his unhappy friend. But now it was all over. He could not try to lighten the burden which had been too heavy for Sir George's strength to bear.

Among the many letters which Hayward received about this time, concerning the tragedy that had happened in the woods at Massam, was one from Horace Jervis. Hayward felt his face flush and his hands tremble when he read it. It was just like the writer, all kindness and thought for others, and here and there Hilda's name appeared. "My dear wife was with me——" and so on. She was evidently a dear wife, dear and well-beloved, as she deserved to be, Hayward thought with all his heart. But this letter, nevertheless, left a sort of aching void and pain in his breast.

"Do come and see us," Jervis wrote; and as Hayward was forced to be in town a few days after he received it, for the

purpose of proving Sir George's will, he made up his mind to call upon his old friends.

He sent in his card when he arrived at the neat, modest, well-furnished house that Jervis had taken for his wife, and while he was rather nervously standing in the drawing-room, expecting Hilda's entrance, a lady entered, who, for a moment, he actually thought was Hilda.

"Hilda!" he said, rather in an agitated voice, holding out his hand; but without any agitation the lady placed her hand in his.

"Mr. Hayward!" she said, smiling, "I must introduce myself. I am not Hilda—Mrs. Jervis, but I am Marion Marston, Hilda's sister. I daresay you have often heard of me? At least, I have often heard of you," she added, with another smile.

Upon this Hayward looked at the young lady before him, and saw one of those strange family likenesses which we some-

times see in faces which are yet very different to each other. In features the sisters were extremely alike, but Marion's expression was totally different to Hilda's. It lacked the pathetic sweetness of the younger sister's, for Marion's nature had grown harder in her days of trouble, while Hilda had only become more tender and more sad.

But still Marion Marston was a very good-looking girl. She was lively and agreeable also, and was bent upon making herself pleasant to Hayward.

"Hilda has told me of what we owe you," she said, with some feeling in her voice—"little Ned's life, and I know not what. In fact, Hilda says that we can never repay you for all your kindness."

As Marion said this she looked very kindly at Hayward; while Hayward was wondering what made her voice so different to Hilda's.

"Your sister is a great friend of mine," he said. "I trust that she is well?"

"Oh, yes," replied Marion; "and she will be here directly. She is busy distributing some blankets, or something of that kind, to some of Mr. Jervis's poor people. You know," she continued, with a little laugh, "I have only one fault to find with my new brother-in-law, and that is—he is too good."

"It is a good fault," said Hayward, smiling.

"Yes," said Marion; and she also smiled. Jervis had at least been very good to her, and Marion owed him some gratitude. He had, in fact, offered her a home, as well as little Ned; and when Hayward first went to Jervis's house, he found that Marion lived there, and that the tired and hard-worked governess was now a welcome guest beneath her brother-in-law's kindly roof.

Just when Marion Marston and Hayward were speaking of Jervis, the room door again opened, and this time Hilda entered. For a moment she did not speak

as Hayward held her hand tightly clasped; for a moment a slight contraction and a pallor passed over her face, but the next she recovered herself, and looked up with her calm, soft, grey eyes into his face.

There had passed over her expression a nameless change since Hayward had seen her. He could not tell what it was, but her face was altered. She was kind and gentle in her manner to him, and said how glad Mr. Jervis would be to see him, but everything she said sounded sad. Yet she never said anything sad. But she had none of the change and brightness of manner which distinguishes a happy woman. The petulant gaiety with which a loving wife will at times talk to her husband, was totally absent in Hilda's manner to Jervis. She was tender, gentle, and considerate to him in everything—"the sweetest, best of women," Jervis told Hayward—but Hayward felt somehow that all this sweetness and gentleness arose rather from duty than from love.

He stayed to dine with them, and everything in Hilda's house was arranged to perfection. She was a good housekeeper, and spared no trouble to keep everything in order. It was a pleasant little dinner-party. Marion Marston exerted herself to be very agreeable, and Jervis was all kindness and geniality. Then, when the sisters retired together to the drawing-room, Marion began to talk of Hayward.

"I declare I have half lost my heart already," she said, laughing. "How charming he is! I only wish he would take a fancy to me, Hilda."

The younger sister suppressed a sigh, and answered kindly, "Well, I am sure you could get no one better, my dear."

"And he's well off, isn't he now?" continued Marion, inquiringly.

"Yes," answered Hilda, slowly. "But," she added, after a moment's thought, "don't think of him for that, dear. Philip Hayward deserves to be loved for himself alone."

"But one must live, you know," said Marion, with another laugh; and Hilda bent down her head and gave a low, soft sigh, which her sister did not hear.

Strange to say, at that moment Hayward was sitting downstairs, wondering if Marion Marston would suit him for a wife. "She is good-looking, lively, and very agreeable," he was thinking; and she is Hilda's sister——" But this last thought did not add to her attractions in Hayward's mind. Hilda's sister—Hilda, whose sweet, grave face wore such a sad look to Hayward's eyes. But then he must not think of Hilda; and so he went up-stairs determined to be very agreeable to Marion.

Marion was delighted, and responded to his advances very eagerly. The two sat together chatting and laughing, and then Marion sang and played. Hilda was very quiet. She sat stitching, stitching on, mechanically, at some coarse, hard work. All her life had been hard, hard work,

she was thinking—yes, all her life. But she must bear it—she must go on with it—it was God's will, and she must submit.

"Hilda," cried Marion, from the other side of the room, "will you go with us to-morrow to the Exhibition of Water-Colours? I was telling Mr. Hayward about that lovely piece of woodland, painted by Horace's friend."

"Yes, I will go with you," answered Hilda; but the patient ring in her voice, the touch of suppressed pain that she could not hide, was heard by Hayward; and he rose from Marion's side and went and stood by Hilda.

"What are you manufacturing?" he said, touching Hilda's coarse work.

"Clothes for Horace's poor," said Hilda, in her gentle way, glancing up as Hayward addressed her; and as Hayward stood looking at her sweet face he sighed deeply.

Yes, he had thrown away this dear woman's love, he was thinking, for what?

For false smiles that meant nothing, and for honeyed words whose very sweetness was their sting. Truly, Isabel Trevor had cost him dear. But for her——

“Mr. Hayward,” said Marion, interrupting his reverie and coming to his side, “let us settle about to-morrow. Will you come here to lunch, and we can go to the Exhibition afterwards?”

“Yes,” said Hayward, looking round, “if your sister will go with us.”

“Oh, yes, I will go anywhere,” said Hilda; and so they fixed it. All the next day Hayward was with the sisters. Marion evidently thought that she was making a conquest, and Hayward did not care to undeceive her. “She would do very well,” he began to think. What was the good of thinking of Hilda? he ought to have thought of her long ago. So he talked to Marion, and Hilda walked gravely and quietly beside them.

Hayward stayed two days in town, and then returned to Massam. He had lived

at the Park since Sir George's death, for an especial clause of Sir George's will had appointed him guardian to his two sons. Thus, when he arrived he was surprised by the mysterious air with which the butler received him.

"Can I speak a few words in private, Mr. Hayward?" half-whispered the man; and he led Hayward at once into the library, carefully closing the door behind them.

"Who do you think has arrived, sir?" he said, still lowering his voice.

"Arrived? How can I tell?" answered Hayward.

"My lady came yesterday," said the butler, with some small pleasure in his heart, perhaps, to be the bearer of such momentous news. "She informed us that she intends to dispute the late Sir George's will, and claim the title for her son, the infant Mr. Reginald."

As the butler gave Hayward this information the handle of the library door

turned sharply ; and when Hayward and the man looked round to see who was the intruder, Isabel, Lady Hamilton, stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN'S PROPOSAL.

ISABEL came slowly forward as Hayward and the butler looked round. Her face was pale, and her expression was determined and defiant. Some shame there must have been in her heart, some shrinking; but she scarcely showed this. Yet for a moment her eyes fell when she met Hayward's indignant and scornful glance.

"You are surprised to see me?" she began. "Yet can you wonder at me coming here to defend the rights of my son?"

"His rights are not attacked that I know of," answered Hayward, briefly and coldly.

"Then what about this base-born boy, who now claims to be the heir of Massam?" retorted Isabel.

"He is simply Sir George's eldest son by his first marriage," replied Hayward, in the same cold tone.

"And you believe this?" said Isabel, passionately. "You believe this lie that Sir George invented to show his hate to me! But I do not believe it," she continued, "I believe this boy to be Sir George's son; but his natural son."

"I cannot dispute the question with you," said Hayward.

"Why?" asked Isabel. "Leave the room," she said, in her old imperious way, to the butler. "I wish to speak in private to Mr. Hayward."

"I cannot stay——" began Hayward; but with a wave of her hand Isabel pointed to the door, and the butler was thus compelled to go. When they were alone the expression of Isabel's face changed, and a softer look came over it.

"Hayward," she said, and then paused ; but Hayward never looked at her. He stood there cold, embarrassed, and silent—the man who had once loved her with such passionate love.

"I do not plead for myself," continued Isabel, in her syren voice, glancing at Hayward's stern face, "but for the boy. Whatever I am—however they may have blackened my character, little Reggy is not to blame."

"You mistake the whole thing, I think," said Hayward. "Sir George before his death acknowledged his first marriage, and by his will left young Juan the heir to Massam. After his unhappy death this will was proved—therefore, no one can dispute it."

"I will, then," said Isabel, angrily ; "the will of a madman ! Hush, do not interrupt me," she continued, as Hayward was about to speak. "I know what you would say—that it is your duty, and so on. But, Hayward, is this justice ? You

talk of Sir George's unhappy death, but what about my unhappy marriage? Do you know how this man treated me? Cruelly, most cruelly! He found out I never loved him; that I loved—well, I must not say—you would not believe me, I suppose—but, at least, that I did not love *him*!”

“No, I would not believe you,” said Hayward, bitterly, as Isabel paused.

“But why?” said Isabel. “Have you heard the truth of my story? Do you know that he turned me out of the house at Brighton? People say that I ran away with Captain Warrington, but people were wrong; I did not run away with Captain Warrington, but my husband thrust me out of doors.”

“He had good cause!” said Hayward, with bitter indignation in his voice and manner.

“Yes,” said Isabel; “good cause—I never loved him.”

As Isabel said this, Hayward lifted his

eyes and looked at the beautiful face that had brought so much ruin and shame. Isabel stood there pale and daring. She had always liked Hayward; liked him in her cold selfish way, and she had been so used to triumph over the hearts of men, that she thought she would triumph now.

"Hayward!" she said presently; and this time her voice was very soft and low, and her bright eyes fell, and her bosom heaved. "Hayward!"

"Well?" said the young man, sharply and briefly.

"Don't judge me as others judge me," went on Isabel, in the same soft pleading tones. "You, at least, should be lenient—you, for whose sake I could never love my husband."

Hayward made no answer. She was lying to him, he told himself, so he let her go on.

"I was unhappy," continued Isabel, after a moment's pause, "unhappy and reckless.

I flirted with these men—flirted—and they, it was folly, of course, but they learnt to like me too well. This was the truth about all those stupid letters that you read from Mr. Hannaway, and, I suppose, from Captain Warrington. Do you understand now? Sir George was madly jealous because I had no love to give him—and I was careless and unhappy because——”

As Isabel said this last word she raised her eyes to Hayward's face. There was a dark red flush on his usually pale skin, and this sign of emotion emboldened her to go on.

“Do you understand now, Hayward?” she said—“understand how a woman can love, and yet sacrifice that love to pride and ambition? I did this. I was badly brought up, and I was vain and proud. I accepted Sir George—and then—then learnt to care for you.”

“Yes,” said Hayward, with a kind of gasp, “go on—let me hear the whole story.”

"It is easily told," answered Isabel. "As I said, I was vain and proud—and you were poor."

"A poor tutor!" interrupted Hayward, with quivering curling lips.

"At least," continued Isabel, "you were not in a worldly point of view a fitting match for me. So I drove you away—that dark and dismal day in the picture gallery—and until you were gone I never knew the true feelings of my heart! I was engaged to Sir George—bound to him by my own wish—and pride, ambition, vanity, all urged me to keep my word. I did keep it—I married—I became Lady Hamilton of Massam; and then I found out what I had flung away. I was weary of my new position and my wealth before I came back here as a bride, but most weary of the gloomy selfish man whose name I bore! So I was ready to rush into any folly—any madness. You know all about poor Hannaway? Shall I tell you now about Captain Warrington?"

"Have you any motive for telling me?" asked Hayward, in a passion-stifled voice.

"Yes, I have," answered Isabel. "I wish to clear myself, to a certain extent at least, in your eyes. Well, as I said, you know about Mr. Hannaway? After this affair Sir George turned absolutely to hate me! If he could say a cruel thing, if he could do a cruel thing, he did it. At last, after Miss Marston's wedding, I could bear it no longer, and went to Brighton. This Captain Warrington was there. I flirted with him, and he flirted with me. He wrote me foolish letters, and I answered them, and was reckless and careless about being seen with him constantly in public."

"Yes," again said Hayward, in the same husky tones.

"Then one night," went on Isabel, "Sir George arrived, and ordered me, just as if I were a dog, to have my things packed, and to return at once to Massam. As we were talking, his eyes fell on a

ring lying on the dressing-table. It was one of the rings that dead woman wore whose body you brought to shore at Sanda. Sir George sprang upon it like a tiger! Then he demanded where I got it. I refused to tell him. I was going to a concert with Mrs. Woodford and her brother, and I asked Sir George—mark this, please, Hayward—to go with me. But no. He bid me go, and then as soon as I was out of the house he broke open my locks—read Captain Warrington's foolish letters—and, when I came back, coolly and literally turned me out of the house!"

"And you went——"

"To Mrs. Woodford. Then I went to Paris with another lady, and Captain Warrington escorted us there—but I did not run away with Captain Warrington, and in Paris I scarcely saw him."

"And your motive for telling me all this?" again said Hayward.

Isabel cast down her beautiful eyes. Then she put out one of her ungloved

hands, and laid it pleadingly on Hayward's arm.

"I am free now, Hayward," she said, almost in a whisper. "I know now how mad a thing I did before—this time I shall not marry for ambition——"

As she said this Hayward turned away, and covered his face with his hand.

"We are both still young," continued Isabel; "let us forget the past—let us——" But with something between an exclamation and a cry, Hayward interrupted her,"

"Hush, hush!" he said, "do not stain your womanhood any more."

"What do you mean?" asked Isabel.

"This!" exclaimed Hayward, passionately, looking round and facing her. "You have told me this long story, and for what? Because you are free, you say—free, do you mean to marry me?"

"Yes," said Isabel, though in a half-frightened tone; for his manner was so excited and so strange.

"Then shall I tell you the truth?" said Hayward, vehemently. "Shall I tell you that before I would take your hand in mine, before I would call you by the sacred name of wife, I would put a pistol to my throat and end it all! What!" he continued, "do you think I am mad? Do you think I have forgotten Sir George's broken heart and shame-stained name? Do you think I have forgotten the smiles and looks with which you wiled me on, or the false words with which you deceived poor Hannaway, and turned your husband's heart to gall?"

"How dare you!" exclaimed Isabel, with flashing eyes and burning cheeks, as Hayward paused; "how dare you speak to me thus?"

"Because you have lost all claim to respect or honour," said Hayward. "Because you have been lying to me ever since you came into this room—trying to deceive me as you deceived me long ago. But a man wakes up from his folly sometimes," he con-

tinued, with a bitter laugh. "Shall I tell you, Lady Hamilton, the day I woke up from mine? Do you remember the day when Hilda Marston was married? She was a good girl, and I had learned to love her then with a better love than I ever gave to you. But that day ended my delusion completely."

"And how, pray, was that?" asked Isabel, scornfully throwing back her head.

"I opened the billiard-room door," answered Hayward, "and stood unnoticed a few minutes there. Do you understand now? You were there, and Captain Warrington—the man whom you have just been telling me was nothing to you?"

As these bitter words passed Hayward's lips Lady Hamilton's face turned scarlet, and then grew suddenly pale. She saw at that moment that her power over Hayward was ended for ever. She had been found out. Her falseness had been brought home to her, and her cunning words had returned as stabs to her own breast. But

she had one weapon left, and she used it.

"I have been a fool," she said, contemptuously, after a moment's thought. "I came into this room intending to conciliate you; intending to atone to you in some way for the disappointment that you have so often reproached me with, when you—a tutor in a country school—forgot yourself so far as to dare to make love to me. But I had another motive," she went on vindictively, "as well as this amiable one! Can you guess what I mean? No—I will tell you, then—I wished to spare the memory of Sir George!"

"How?" said Hayward, sharply.

"I am not quite an idiot, you know," continued Lady Hamilton, "and I can lay this thing to that when I choose to do so. How about the dead woman's ring, the sight of which startled Sir George almost to madness—the dead woman whose body was washed to shore at Sanda, days before the wreck of Sir George's yacht—the dead

woman who was Sir George's mistress—the mother of the base-born youth who claims to be his heir?"

Isabel paused after she had made this speech, and she saw in a moment that it had struck home to Hayward's heart. So she had hit the right nail on the head at last, she thought. Hayward knew Sir George's secret—knew of the guilty deed that she had but guessed at.

"Do you see now what I mean?" she said. "You pretended to be, or were, fond of Sir George; do you wish his name to be branded as a murderer's?"

"You have no proof," said Hayward, quickly and passionately.

"A hundred proofs," replied Isabel. "First, this woman's body was washed ashore days before the wreck of the yacht. Then, do you think that I could live with Sir George, and not see that he was weighed down by remorse? Do you think I heard no muttered words in his sleep that I could not understand then, but

which I do now? Do you think that when he first saw that ring that he hid his guilt? With a cry he exclaimed that his sin had found him out—and from that hour, I knew that Sir George had murdered this woman!”

“Be silent! be silent!” cried Hayward, in uncontrollable emotion.

“No, I will not be silent!” said Isabel. “I will proclaim his deed! I will blacken his name as he blackened mine, unless you will help me to do what I came here to do—protect the rights of my son.”

“How can I do it?” said Hayward. “Sir George was married to this Spanish woman, and their son was born after this marriage. My hands are tied—I cannot help you.”

“Do you know that he went down to Sanda to see her grave?” said Isabel. “Do you know that Mr. Irvine thought that he was mad at least, and that the servants here all declare that for days before his death—nay, for weeks—he was

not in his right mind ? Upon this plea the will can be thrown aside. Sir George was mad when he made it—mad when he declared a marriage which in all human probability never took place.”

“Lady Hamilton,” said Hayward, “do not deceive yourself. This marriage did take place. I saw the priest in Seville who married them—the priest who had charge, until I brought him here, of this young Juan.”

“Then you intend to stand by the will?” said Isabel, and her lip curled. “The will that gives you twenty-five thousand pounds, and at the same time brands your late dear friend’s name as a murderer’s.”

“I will endeavour to do my duty, whatever is the consequence,” said Hayward, firmly.

“This, then, will be the consequence,” retorted Isabel. “I mean to dispute the will. I mean—as you will have it so—to let the world know the truth about

Sir George!" And having said this, Isabel turned and left the room, leaving Hayward a prey to the most miserable reflections.

CHAPTER XII.

A LAWSUIT.

ALL that night Hayward never slept. How could he stop this vindictive woman's tongue, he was thinking; how save Sir George's memory from the awful charge with which she was about to blacken it?

"But, for the child's sake, for little Reggy's sake, surely she will be persuaded," at last he began to hope. So in the early morning he decided to seek another interview with Isabel.

He went down to breakfast late, weary and heartsore. A little note was lying on the table, addressed to him, when he entered the breakfast-room, and the hand-

writing on this he at once recognized as Isabel's. Eagerly, then, he opened it, and read the following words:—

“DEAR MR. HAYWARD,—As you have refused to help me, and are determined to stand by the will that wrongs my son and provides so handsomely for yourself, I am determined to do what I consider I have full right to do, namely, take charge of my own child. When you receive this, therefore, I shall have left Massam, and taken little Reggy with me. Do not attempt to interfere with me. I understand that Sir George intended to endeavour to obtain a divorce from me if he had lived; but, luckily for Reggy and myself, he is dead, and I am not divorced, but am Lady Hamilton of Massam still. When you leave the Park, and take away the base-born boy that you have brought there, I may return to Massam; until then, I shall remain in town, and take immediate steps to overturn the will of

that unhappy madman, whose crimes, I suppose, had upset his reason.

“I remain, yours truly,

“ISABEL HAMILTON.”

Hayward read this letter and then seized the room-bell, and began ringing it violently. The butler appeared hastily to answer his summons.

“Is Lady Hamilton gone?” he asked the moment the man came into the room.

“Yes, her ladyship left an hour ago,” replied the butler, “in time to catch the early train south. Her ladyship informed us last night,” he added, “of her intentions; and said that it was by your wish that she and the infant, Master Reginald, were leaving.”

“And she has taken the child?” said Hayward.

“Yes, the child and the head nurse,” answered the man; and Hayward felt at that moment that Isabel had completely out-witted him.

But he was little Reginald's guardian, as well as young Juan's. He therefore determined at once to follow Isabel, and started for town two hours after she had done so.

But when he got there he could not find her. He went to nearly all the principal hotels, but still he could hear nothing of Lady Hamilton. Then he went to the lawyer who had drawn out Sir George's last will.

This gentleman was a jovial, smiling man, with a pleasant face and a smooth and pleasant tongue, and he listened smilingly to Hayward's tale.

"She has no chance," he said, when the story was finished. "She may dispute Sir George's will, but unless she can prove he was out of his senses when he instructed it to be drawn out and signed it, the will will hold good. And," added the lawyer, "her own misconduct and Sir George's projected divorce from her will fatally damage any evidence she can produce."

"And you think the marriage with this Spanish woman—with young Juan's mother, can be proved?" asked Hayward.

"Certainly; Sir George instructed me how in the event of his death it could be proved," answered the lawyer. "There is no doubt, I suppose," he added, "that Sir George's death was a case of murder, and not of suicide?"

"Everything valuable that he had about his person had disappeared," said Hayward, "and there was no weapon near where he was found with which he could have inflicted the fatal wound."

The lawyer looked thoughtful.

"He had disappeared two days, had he not," he said, after a moment's silence, "before his remains were discovered? It would be a weak point in our case if there were any idea of suicide."

"But——" began Hayward, and then he, too, was silent. He was afraid, in fact to speak—afraid to think of the dark suspicion which sometimes involuntarily had

crossed his mind regarding Sir George's tragic death.

"Well, we shall hear from her ladyship, I suppose, in a few days," said the lawyer. "In the meanwhile, I have no doubt that her little son is quite safe in her hands."

They did hear from her ladyship in a few days. In fact, Lady Hamilton at once took formal proceedings to dispute her late husband's will. He was insane, she stated, at the time it was made, and her lawyers gave her cause to suppose that she might win her case.

Sir George had been undoubtedly strange in his conduct for a long time, and after his miserable discovery of his wife's guilt, and of the dead woman's ring, at Brighton, his gloom and eccentricity had been obvious and remarkable. Then this will had been made after these events. And his sudden and violent death was also in her favour. Had he really been murdered? Isabel instructed her lawyers to endeavour to

Hayward and smiled. Then Hayward was called ; but during a sharp cross-examination he firmly stated his belief that Sir George was in his sane mind at the time the will was made. It was made, he said, after Lady Hamilton had left her husband, and after Sir George had determined to acknowledge his first marriage with Catalina Mendoza. He had not acknowledged this until the present Lady Hamilton had left her home, and he then stated to Hayward that he had an elder legitimate son by this first marriage. This son he had left his heir, while in his sane mind, Hayward believed, and his marriage with Catalina Mendoza was an undoubted fact.

But it is useless to go on with a long story, and to relate all the evidence and counter-evidence that was given during a case that lasted many days and was contested by the best lawyers in England. It is sufficient to tell that on the direct and simple evidence of Padre Fernandez

of Seville, a grey-haired and venerable priest, who had himself performed the ceremony of marriage between the unfortunate Catalina and Sir George, that this marriage was proved to the satisfaction of the special jury who tried the case. Thus Sir George, also, to the minds of the jurymen, had shown no signs of madness in leaving his eldest legitimate son his heir. The question of his murder or suicide remained unsolved, and the darker question of how the unhappy Catalina came to her death also remained a mystery. On this last point no cross-examination extracted any information of the truth from the one person who knew. Hayward kept his dead friend's secret, and there was no one knew that Sir George had confided it to his ears. Lady Hamilton might insinuate what she liked, but Lady Hamilton had no proof to go on. The sea had swallowed up the only witnesses of Sir George's bitterly-repenting crime.

So Isabel lost her case. The twelve

jurymen sympathized with the husband, dead though he was, whose wife had left him for another man, and could understand Sir George's gloom and his tardy acknowledgment of his first marriage when his second had ended so unhappily. In an able and powerful speech, the leading counsel retained in favour of the validity of the will pointed out how this wife, who was now disputing it, had brought but shame to her husband and disgrace to her child. "She would have you believe he was mad," continued the counsel; "the gloom that her own conduct had caused she ascribes to some hidden crime, to some dark secret, forgetting his betrayed affections, his blighted and dishonoured home!"

Lady Hamilton was forced to sit and listen to these bitter words—was forced to sit and learn that she had lost her case, and that her shame was known from one end of England to the other. She went out from court a disgraced and

enraged woman; and the very man for whom she had sacrificed so much refused, after such a public exposure, he said, to make her his wife. She was ordered also to give up the custody of her child, and furious, half-maddened, she returned to her hotel after the trial was over in a state pitiable to behold.

But this unhappy disgraced woman had one visitor. During the time the case was pending Hayward had remained in town, and had naturally seen much of the Jervises. After it was over, and the jury had decided in favour of the will, he went to tell Hilda and Jervis of the decision.

"And Lady Hamilton," said Jervis, after he had heard Hayward's news, "is there no one with her in this hour, that must be such a very bitter one to her?"

"No one that I know of," answered Hayward, briefly. "No woman, I suppose, would now care to be seen with her."

Then Hilda looked at her husband.

"May I go, Horace?" she said. "Perhaps I might be of some use to her."

Horace Jervis crossed the room as Hilda spoke, and took his wife's hand in his.

"Yes, go, my dear one," he said; "she will truly need someone like you to be near her now."

So Hilda went. She asked for Lady Hamilton, but was told she could see no one; and then she asked to see the lady's maid, Ritson.

This woman came to her crying and trembling.

"Oh! Miss Marston — Mrs. Jervis, I mean," she said, "my lady is in a fearful state! She says she'll cut her throat, or do something to herself, and I don't know what to do."

"Take me to her," said Hilda; "I am her old friend. I will try to help and comfort her now."

Then Ritson led Hilda to the room, where, pacing backward and forward, like

a caged wild animal, was the once beautiful and gracious Lady Hamilton. Her face was distorted with passion, and flushed and stained with bitter tears of rage and shame. She was panting and gasping, and turned round like a fury when she saw Hilda and Ritson enter the room.

"Who is that?" she said loudly. "How dare you let anyone in here?"

Then Hilda went forward, and in her gentle tender way tried to take Isabel's hot clenched hand.

"Isabel," she said, "don't you know me? I am Hilda."

"Yes, I know you!" half screamed the miserable Isabel. "Have you come to triumph over me—come to say spiteful horrible things in pretended sympathy, like you women who set up to be good, do?"

"I am come to stay with you for a little while," said Hilda, even yet more gently and kindly. "Don't send me away, dear—we won't talk—you are tired and over excited."

Upon this, the unhappy Isabel looked in Hilda's sweet, patient face; and then suddenly burst into a passion of tears, and fell weeping on Hilda's neck.

"You good women have the best of it, I believe," sobbed the miserable woman. "You never, at least, were utterly forsaken, as I am now!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A WIDOWER'S WOOING.

HILDA stayed many days with Isabel after this. Stayed, and tried to soothe her when she raved and tossed, and finally, when fever crept into her frame, and she lay stricken down and powerless. She was very very ill. It was low fever at first, the doctors said, and then typhus. When this word began to be whispered about, the proprietor of the private hotel where she was staying went to Hilda, and requested that Lady Hamilton should be removed. It seemed a hard thing to ask, the man said; but then every one must attend to his own interest.

Hilda did not speak. She wrote a few

lines to her husband to tell him of the intimation that she had received; and an hour later Jervis arrived at the hotel.

"What shall we do, Horace?" she asked when she saw him.

"Who should be our chosen guests, Hilda?" he answered, with his frank sweet smile. "The sick and sorrowing, dear—and Lady Hamilton is both sick and sorrowing. Let us take her to our home!"

So they took the fever-stricken woman home; Marion Marston and little Ned were sent away, and the baby Reginald Hamilton, but Hilda and Jervis remained, and watched and tended on Isabel for many weeks. Sometimes she knew them, and sometimes forgot all about the bitter past, and spoke and rambled about the days when she had held her head so high.

She had another watcher, too, sometimes, or rather a visitor; who once or twice went up to see her when she lay in a stupor, or rambled in her talk.

This was Hayward. He forgave her then, and pitied her, and then turned away to sigh. But he loved her no more. There was another woman there, whose soul was so pure and true that he scarcely ever dared to look in her face; and yet that woman's presence was very dear to his heart. He saw no beauty now in the golden hair that lay uncurled on Isabel's pillow—no beauty in the straight features and the glittering blue eyes. The dark glimpses that he had seen of the soul beneath had utterly changed his feelings to her, and she was no longer lovely in his eyes.

But Hilda Jervis always seemed very fair. As she moved about the sick-room, and about the house, Hayward caught himself watching and admiring her. But he always told himself that he must not admire her, and he very often went to see Marion Marston and little Ned, in the lodgings that Jervis had taken for them, so as to keep them out of the way

of any infection from the fever-stricken patient lying at his house.

Thus, not unnaturally, Marion began seriously to believe that Hayward admired her. She was indeed a girl whom many men might have admired; but she was so different, Hayward always kept thinking, to Hilda. Not in appearance, for the sisters were very much alike, but there was something wanting. At all events Marion did not charm Hayward, and the more he saw of the sister he might have, the more he regretted the one he had lost. Then he returned to Massam, and shortly after he arrived there, he received a visit of congratulation on the result of the trial, from Mr. Antony Featherstone.

Never had Hayward seen Antony in such full feather as he now appeared. The whole get-up of the man—his whole air—denoted ease and prosperity.

"Well, you bowled her ladyship over very cleverly, Hayward," he commenced his conversation with.

"Lady Hamilton is very ill, Mr. Featherstone," answered Hayward quietly. Hilda's example had impressed him too much to feel any triumph over Isabel now.

"Ah, she's a cunning fox," laughed Antony. "What! she's been trying to get over you again, has she? Well, well, never mind—she's a deuced handsome woman, and that goes a good way, you know, with us men!" And Antony laughed again, and pulled his greyish whiskers with much self-satisfaction.

"Yes, she is very handsome," said Hayward slowly. He was thinking of all the evil that her beauty had brought—of her husband's broken heart and tragic death.

"No doubt about it," said Antony cheerily. "But when a fellow thinks of marriage, he needs something besides mere good looks." And for the first time that Hayward had ever seen him do so Antony assumed an air of virtuous discretion, which was highly amusing.

"Yes," said Hayward, smiling.

"But I must not forget what I specially came for," continued Antony. "My daughter Lucinda and her husband are staying with us, and Mrs. Smythe."

"Mrs. Smythe?" repeated Hayward, as if he half remembered the name.

"Yes, Mrs. Smythe, of Leeholme Hall, Northumberland," said Antony, with something between a leer and a wink in his once handsome but now bloodshot eyes. "A rich widow, my boy! What do you think of that?"

"Well, Mr. Featherstone, will it do?" said Hayward, with a laugh.

"I'm willing!" answered Antony, with a loud laugh also; and to make a long story short, Hayward found this absolutely to be the case. This Mrs. Smythe was a widow, and a country neighbour of the Trevors at Sanda, and Antony had courted her, as he had courted many a rich woman before. But he did it under different auspices now. Mrs. Smythe knew nothing

of Antony's mortgaged acres—nothing of his difficulties and debt. She had met him at his son-in-law's, Mr. Trevor's, and the good-looking, jovial, middle-aged man had taken the widow's fancy. So she accepted Antony, and Antony now looked and spoke as if he had never had a trouble in the world. He was sorry for poor fellows in debt, and talked exactly as if he had been respectable all his days. And now he had come to ask Hayward to dine with them on a certain day that he named.

“Patty sent me,” he said, with another roguish look of his bloodshot eyes. “Patty ordered me to go and ask the best-looking young man in the neighbourhood, she said—and Patty isn't a girl very easy to please, I can tell you—and like a good-natured young fellow, you know, as I am” (and Antony leered again) “I came. Well, sharp seven on Thursday, and until then, my dear lad, good-bye.”

Hayward went to dine at Featherstone, and he could not help smiling somewhat grimly to himself as he dressed to do so. He knew well enough why he was considered so good-looking now. The twenty-five thousand pounds that Sir George had left him had straightened and improved his features in many eyes, he was well aware. We all really know these things, but some of us can afford to think of them with a good-natured smile. Perhaps there was some one who cared for us long ago, before the days of prosperity came! Someone had cared for him, Hayward knew; and he thought of Hilda as he dressed himself to go and dine with Patty Featherstone.

Patty and Lucinda received him with the greatest cordiality. Fine, tall, handsome, reddish-haired Patty, had thought of Hayward since she heard of his good fortune, in precisely the same way that Marion Marston had thought of him. "He was a good-looking young man, and

he would do," Patty had told her sister; and Lucinda was perfectly agreeable to assist her in her matrimonial projects.

So Patty was very agreeable to Hayward, just as Marion was very agreeable to him. She went up to him smilingly, and introduced the stout lady, covered with black lace and bugles, who was the chosen one of reckless Antony's heart. But Antony was reckless no more. He took Mrs. Smythe down to dinner, and exerted himself to be agreeable, just as Patty was exerting herself. The widow was not squeamish, and Antony's coarse compliments and highly-seasoned jokes were very pleasant to her ears. The house looked very comfortable, she thought; Patty was sure to marry, and Lucinda was well married; and Mrs. Smythe thought that she was making a good match, as well as pleasing herself in the bargain. Only Mr. Trevor, the old pompous Squire of Sanda, did not look on very approvingly. He knew where Antony's apparent

prosperity came from. He had lent Antony money, and he knew in his heart that Antony was deceiving the widow about his ways and means. But his good-natured Lucinda had persuaded the old man not to speak.

"She has plenty for them both," Lucinda had told her husband; and so everything went on smoothly, with Antony's courtship.

"Let me help you to a wing of this duck, my charmer, it's deliciously juicy," Antony was half-whispering to the widow during dinner, for she was a woman who loved good things, and enjoyed her meals as well as Antony's conversation. "Or just one little slice off the breast, then?" he went on insinuatingly, with his fork in the breast of the tempting bird before him, when the temporary butler, who was waiting, mysteriously touched his arm.

"What is it, Jackson?" said Antony, looking round with a grand air, though there had been a time not very far away

when a little tap on the arm was rather alarming to him.

"A person, sir——wants to see you immediately," replied the temporary butler in a very subdued tone of voice.

"I'm engaged," said Antony, still grandly. "Ah, Mrs. Smythe," rolling his eyes at the widow, "how tiresome these people are, who are continually coming begging for some charity or other! Say I'm engaged, Jackson," he repeated, looking round at the temporary butler.

"I did say so, sir," said the butler, "*but he won't go away.*"

The widow heard the last words, and Antony heard them. The widow looked up curiously, and Antony looked down, and felt very uncomfortable. Then came a sort of scuffle at the dining-room door, and Antony rose hastily and went towards it.

The guests at the table all looked round. Hayward was sitting by Patty, and he saw her face suddenly turn red and then

grow very pale. Then she also half rose, but by this time Antony had quitted the dining-room, and had closed the door behind him.

A stormy interview awaited him in the hall. An old creditor whom Antony had dodged and put off for many a year, had heard that he was at Featherstone again, and his rich son-in-law with him. The old creditor decided that this was his opportunity for getting his money. He accordingly had arrived at the Hall for the purpose of trying to do so, and had, as the temporary butler subsequently stated, taken "a drop too much" before he came. His wrath was therefore greatly excited when he found that a grand dinner party was going on in the house of a man who had kept him out of his money now so long. In vain the servants had tried to pacify him, in vain induce him to go away.

No, he would see the cheating scoundrel, he affirmed, and he actually was forcing

his way into the dining-room, when Antony very wisely went out of it.

And now he told Antony he would *not* go away without his money.

"My dear sir," said Antony, "hush! I am on the point of marriage," he whispered, dragging his importunate creditor into the breakfast-room, and closing the door after them; "on the point of marriage with a lady of large fortune! Think of that—property, absolute real property in Northumberland!"

"Don't believe it," said the inebriate creditor.

"But it is a fact, my dear sir!" cried Antony, in a perfect agony. Oh! if he should miss his widow after all, he was thinking; and dew broke out on his red brow at the very idea.

"I'll not stir without some of my money," said the creditor, doggedly.

"But listen to reason," said Antony.

"It's reason that I should have my money," repeated the creditor.

Antony looked round in despair, and wiped his hot red face. He knew not where to lay his hand on any ready money at that moment, and he knew that if he went to ask his son-in-law, Mr. Trevor, that the pompous tiresome old man would make a hundred objections, and be so long in promising even fifty pounds that the widow must know that something mysterious was happening. Then he remembered Hayward—remembered that he was a young man, and would part more easily, in all probability, with his money than an old one would; and so he made up his mind to ask him for a small sum.

"It's a pity, on account of Patty," reflected Antony; "but it can't be helped."

So he told his creditor to wait where he was, and he would see what he could do. Then he sent the temporary butler

with a message to Hayward in the dining room. Hayward smiled when he received this message, for he felt sure that Antony had got himself into some trouble, and

wanted Hayward to help him out of it. But the next moment he felt sorry for Patty Featherstone, by whom he was seated. The girl's quick ears had overheard the half-whispered message that her father had sent, and her face flushed deeply, and an expression of pain and annoyance passed over it.

"What is it?" she said, with some agitation.

"Your father wants to speak to me on business for a minute, that is all," answered Hayward kindly; and Patty gave him a grateful look with her bright brown eyes as he said these few words.

"Excuse me a moment or two," added Hayward, rising; and he then left the dining-room, and found Antony in a state of great excitement waiting for him in the hall.

"My dear lad," said Antony, seizing Hayward by the arm the moment he appeared, "can you do me a little favour? A fellow—half drunk, of course—that I

owe a trifle to, wants me to settle with him on the spot. I haven't the sum in the house, and old Trevor—you know what a pompous old fool he is—would be an hour before he got his cheque book out. So would you mind just giving me a little accommodation, and I'll settle with you to-morrow?"

Hayward laughed, and drew out his pocket-book.

"I have an unfilled cheque here, by chance," he said. "How much do you want?"

Antony's eyes sparkled with delight.

"Thank you, my good lad!" he exclaimed. "Ah, well—you may as well fill it in for a hundred pounds."

"Won't fifty do, Mr. Featherstone?" asked Hayward.

"Yes, fifty would do," admitted Antony, with a sigh. So Hayward gave him a cheque for fifty pounds, and in a few minutes Antony got rid of his creditor, and returned with Hayward to the dining-

room, trying his best to look as if nothing had happened.

"Excuse me, my dear lady," he said to Mrs. Symthe, "but I was called out on some business connected—with the——ah, the parish——and I was forced to get my young friend Hayward there to help me."

"Parish business?" repeated the widow. "Then I hope you are a good churchman, Mr. Featherstone?"

"I hope so," said Antony; but he could not resist giving a roguish leer with his bloodshot eyes at Hayward as he spoke.

In the meanwhile, Hayward had again seated himself by Patty Featherstone's side. The girl looked at him very kindly, but she was nervous and excited. She guessed exactly the transaction which had been going on outside the dining-room door. She saw, too, by both their faces, that Hayward had helped her father, and she therefore felt very grateful. This little affair, in fact, that Antony had feared

would destroy his daughter's chances with Hayward, made Hayward like Patty far more than he had ever done before.

Both Lucinda and Patty had a kind of honesty about them, which was very taking. They came straight to the point whatever they were going to say, and the next time Patty saw Hayward after his little accommodation to her father she thanked him openly and frankly.

"I got it all out of the old man," she said. "I was sure there was some trouble or other going on when he went out; and I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Hayward."

"What nonsense," said Hayward good-naturedly, "a mere trifle like that!"

"Don't you get into the way of accommodating him with trifles like that," continued Patty. "Poor old dad! I believe there never was such a reckless old man before."

"And what about the widow? Is it settled?" asked Hayward with a laugh.

"Oh, I believe it's all right," answered Patty, "but somehow I don't quite take to my future stepmother."

"No?" said Hayward; and he looked at Patty thoughtfully.

She was a fine girl, straight and tall, and with an honest, good-natured, open face. She was not very refined. She lacked, Hayward thought, a kind of grace which some much plainer specimens of womanhood possess. She had a loud laugh, and a loud clear voice. But she was a good girl, he believed, and would make a good wife. He liked her better than he liked Marion Marston, and he had made up his mind that he wanted a wife.

This conversation took place some three or four days after the dinner party at Featherstone, when Antony had been called out by his inebriate creditor. It took place one morning at Featherstone, and during it Hayward stood and looked thoughtfully at Patty. Perhaps a little

thing might have turned the scale, for small threads sometimes pull our destinies in very different directions from what we originally intended them; but just as Hayward was contemplating Patty, Antony and his widow walked somewhat abruptly into the room.

Antony looked quite delighted, and the widow was apparently rather fluttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Antony, "you will never guess, you young folk, where we middle-aged ones have been?"

Mrs. Smythe bridled at this, and cast down her eyes.

"Really Mr. Featherstone——" she said.

"Yes, *really*, my dear," continued jovial Antony, looking at his daughter.

"What *do* you mean, papa?" said Patty, rather crossly.

"We've done it!" said Antony. "Come Patty, kiss your new mother. We were married half-an-hour ago, and by this time old Woodford will be telling it all over the place!"

This startling news was perfectly true. Antony had got such a fright when he was called away from the dinner-table a few days before by his inebriate creditor, that other mischances might arise, that he had wooed the widow with what might be called almost desperate affection. His circumstances, he felt, justified him in this ; and the ardour of his devotion was rewarded.

Antony would not wait—in fact, Antony could not. “Something might come between us,” he truthfully urged. “Patty might object—the lawyers, hang them ! might make delays. No, let us get married, and nothing can part us then !”

The widow—unfortunately for herself—listened with too tender an ear to Antony’s eager persuadings. He wanted her money, and pleaded for it with passionate affection. Poor Mrs. Smythe believed he wanted herself, and so without any settlements she married reckless Antony Featherstone !

“I’ve got it at any rate now,” whispered



the bridegroom with unobtrusive action
in Hayward's ear as Patsy was saying a
few kind words to her new brother-in-law.
"It's a heavy price to pay for it, indeed,"
—but a fellow must make some sacrifices."

CHAPTER XV.

A TELEGRAM.

HAYWARD saw a great deal of Patty Featherstone after her father's second marriage. She was constantly meeting him in the lanes and walks about Featherstone and Massam, and was always very lively and agreeable to him. Hayward liked her very well. This was just one of those affairs which might have ended in matrimony, if nothing had happened to prevent it; and the probability is that these two would have jogged on together smoothly enough along life's troublesome way. It was not, and never could have been, a real affection. Not one of those absorbing attachments which end in great happiness

or misery. These come once in a lifetime ; but Patty's feelings to Hayward and Hayward's feelings to Patty can come many a time. In fact, most young men, and most young women, who do not marry in their first youth, have had various small loves and small disappointments, before they finally settle for good or ill.

So Hayward often saw Patty, and thought of her sometimes ; but then he had many other things to think of, also. The management of the large estates entrusted to his care was no light task, and the management of the boy, the young Sir Juan, was also by no means easy.

This lad, with the proud haughty Spanish blood flowing in his veins, had been kept in better order by his late guardian, the venerable Padre Fernandez. This old man had intended the youth to enter the Catholic Church ; but now all this was changed. Young Juan knew of the great fortune that he had inherited, and was careless and impatient of control. At last

Hayward decided that it would be better to apply for him to be made a ward of Chancery. This finally was done, and the lad sent to Eton; but before all this could be arranged, Hayward had his own troubles with the young Spaniard.

He frequently heard from Jervis and Hilda during this time. Lady Hamilton still continued very ill. Sometimes Hilda wrote hopefully of her chances of recovery, and sometimes there seemed to be no hope. She lay there watched, and tended, and prayed for just as if she had been a good woman, and a joy and blessing to her household and her home. Hour after hour Jervis used to pray or sit beside her, hoping and trusting to win back this poor strayed soul. But all still seemed very dark to Isabel. She could not forget her beauty, her triumphs, and her bitter and sudden fall. She used to tell Hilda of women whom she knew, who were far worse than she had ever been, who still held their heads high in their places in

the world. She could not repent. She lay there, alike dreading to die and to live. Her pride, her vanity, made her shrink from once more facing the world that she knew would receive her badly, and she dare not face that Eternal one, where she had no friend.

It was a miserable state of mind, and her mind re-acted upon her fevered and enfeebled frame. Truly she had sown the whirlwind and reaped the storm.

At last there came better accounts to Massam. Some of the worst symptoms were passing away, Hilda wrote; and they began to hope that her originally fine constitution would triumph over the wasting effects of disease, and bitter mortification and pain.

All this while—during her whole illness—her father had taken not the slightest notice of her existence. When she lay at the point of death Jervis had thought it was his duty to write to Mr. Trevor, and inform him of the dangerous condition

in which his daughter was. But the vain, pompous, hard old man had replied in a few bitter words. He wished to hear nothing further of a daughter who had disgraced herself so deeply, he wrote, and begged to inform Mr. Jervis that Lady Hamilton was already dead to him.

His kindly Lucinda was, however, not so hard. She secretly wrote to Hilda to know if Isabel had everything she required in the way of attendance, &c.; and she heard almost daily through Patty, from Hayward, how Lady Hamilton was going on.

She used to tell this news regularly to her old husband. The squire was human, after all; and, though he was too proud to admit it to a stranger, he could not feel quite insensible to his daughter's condition. No word was hard enough from the squire's lips when speaking of Isabel, but still he never reproved his good-natured Lucinda for telling him how she was.

"She is getting better now, they hope," at last said Lucinda.

"She had better have died," replied the squire, bitterly.

Yet he did not quite feel this. He could not quite forget the beautiful girl of whom he once had been so proud. Isabel had stained her name, and brought shame to his vain old heart; but she was his child still. I think he loved his Lucinda better than he had ever done, for her kindly words and thoughts of this fallen one.

A few days after the news had come to Massam that Lady Hamilton was better, Hayward was startled one morning by receiving a pressing telegram from Hilda.

"Come to town at once," were the words it contained. "Horace wishes to see you immediately."

Was Isabel dead? was his first thought. He knew that a sudden turn for the worse might carry her off at any time,

and this idea was a shock to him. He had loved her once. He had given her what he could never give again—the chivalrous devotion of his young manhood—the first deep passionate affection of a warm and sensitive heart.

And was she dead—gone out on the lonely journey that we must all take? Hayward's eyes grew moist, and his hands trembled when he received this telegram, and believed that Hilda had sent it, so as to break the melancholy news.

He went up to town by the first train that he could catch, and drove direct, on arriving there, to the Jervises' house. The servant who opened the door looked distressed, but she said nothing, but ushered him into the dining-room, and a few minutes later Hilda appeared, but paused almost as she crossed the threshold of the door.

"Don't come near me, Philip," she said, with a sad ring in her sweet voice, "it is wiser for you not."

"Why?" asked Hayward advancing.
"Is—is Lady Hamilton dead?"

"Oh no," answered Hilda, "but I have sad news—we fear that Horace has taken the fever."

CHAPTER XVI.

NEAR THE GATES.

"HORACE!" repeated Hayward, after Hilda had told her ill news.

"Yes," said Hilda, slowly, and she sat wearily down on a chair near the door, as if she were quite worn out. "He has not been well for days," she continued. "I have noticed how tired and depressed he seemed, and this morning he saw the doctor——and——and——"

"Well, we must hope he will throw it off," said Hayward, kindly. "I am glad that you sent for me, Hilda."

"It was by his wish," said Hilda. "As soon as he heard that he had taken the fever he asked me to telegraph for you."

"Yes?"

"And he has asked several times for you—but at the same time, if you have any fear——"

"I have none," said Hayward. "I shall be glad to go to him at once."

So Hilda led the way to her husband's bedroom, and as Hayward entered it and looked at Jervis, a certain feeling of awe came over his heart.

Jervis was asleep—an uneasy, fevered sleep. As they stood and looked at him he moaned and tossed. Then he opened his eyes, which had a far-away look in them, unlike their usual cheerful and serene expression.

"Horace!" said Hilda, gently; and at the sound of her voice something of the old familiar look stole back.

"My dear one," he said, and held out a hot thin hand.

"Do you see——Mr. Hayward?" said Hilda.

Then Jervis looked at Hayward, and a

faint quiver, and then a faint smile, passed over his lips.

"I am glad you have come. Thank you for coming, Philip," he said the next minute.

"But I'm sorry to find you ill, Horace," said Hayward.

Then Jervis smiled again — a strange, solemn smile.

"I have received my summons, Philip," he said, quietly. "I believe I am going to eternal rest."

There was no fear in the young man's voice—no shrinking. He was going to rest, and latterly there had been some disquiet, some sharp pangs of mental pain within his heart.

"Oh, Horace!" wept Hilda, "do not talk thus——do not leave me——"

Again Jervis smiled.

"It is all for the best, dear one," he said. "Our Father in heaven is watching over us now."

"But, Horace," said Hilda, kneeling

down by the bed, and taking his hand, "why do you think this? Do you feel so very ill?"

"Yes," answered Jervis, slowly, "and I have much to do in the little time that I have left. This is why I sent for you, Hayward," he continued, looking at Hayward. "You must not leave this poor little woman alone in her time of trouble."

"I will do anything. What can I do?" asked Hayward, much affected.

"First, I want you to help me to make my will," said Jervis. "I will tell you what I want to do, and then will you draw a rough draft out, and take this to some lawyer, and have it properly prepared, and then bring it to me to sign?"

"Of course I will," said Hayward, speaking brusquely and shortly to hide his emotion.

"Go, dear Hilda, then, until this is done," said Jervis. "It would only be painful to you, and I wish to see Hayward alone."

Then Hilda left him, with streaming eyes; and after she was gone, in a calm clear voice Jervis told Hayward how he wished his moderate fortune to be left.

Everything to Hilda—but he also left certain directions and bequests regarding his many charities. To these he prayed “his dear wife” to continue his subscriptions, and left in her hands the sacred trust to give, as far as her means went, to those who needed.

It was a very simple will, and Hayward wrote down Jervis’s words just as he spoke them. Then Jervis said a few words about Lady Hamilton.

“Don’t let her drift further down, Philip,” he said. “She will live now, the doctors say, so stand by her, and act as her friend.”

“But——” hesitated Hayward.

“Remember the poor weak woman has an everlasting life to live,” urged Jervis. Try to make her not forget this—you and Hilda—try to keep her straight by

being her friends, now when she will have so few."

Hayward thought a moment, then he said—

"I will try."

"That is right," said Jervis, with some of his old frank manner. "And now," he added, after a few moments' thought, "I have a few words to say to you, Hayward—that you must remember are spoken now, because I do not know how long speech may be left to me."

"What are they, Horace?"

"About Hilda," said Jervis; and for the first time his voice faltered. "About the dear woman—I have loved too well——"

"Too well——" repeated Hayward, as Jervis paused, evidently deeply affected.

"Yes, too well," he said, solemnly and slowly, as soon as he had recovered himself sufficiently to speak; "for my love blinded me—to the feelings of her heart."

"What do you mean?" asked Hayward, sharply.

"The bitterness is passed," said Jervis, as if he were thinking rather than speaking. "But I know now that for her sake—I am better gone——"

"Why do you say so?" said Hayward, almost passionately.

"Because," answered Jervis, "because I learnt too late that this dear woman——this woman, whose love was so precious to me——whose love I believed was entirely, most truly my own——had yet a secret from me——"

"What?" said Hayward, sharply, as Jervis paused.

"A secret that she had kept, because she thought it was her duty to keep it," continued Jervis. "Can you guess now, Hayward, what I mean?"

Hayward was silent, but a deep red flush spread over his face.

"I see you guess," said Jervis; and for a moment a pang darted into his heart.

But the next, the serene faith of the man triumphed over this momentary weakness.

"She is a good girl," he said, "good and pure, and it was by no fault of hers that I learnt that what she gave to me—was not—Hayward, what she gave to you——"

"Do not speak of it," said Hayward, much agitated, and beginning to pace the room.

"In a little while," continued Jervis, with a ring in his voice so holy and so sweet that Hayward ever after remembered it, "for her, the sorrow for my death will be over. This is why I have conquered the weak—the last weak mortal pang that will stab my heart—and God has given me strength to conquer it. Do not think I did not suffer, Hayward. She was the one woman I had ever loved—but I loved God. He comforted me. His love is all sufficient for me. He has given me strength to tell you this; after I am gone, you must love Hilda."

"Oh! hush! hush!" cried Hayward.

For a moment or two there was silence in the room after this. Then once more, in that sweet and ringing voice, Jervis continued:—

"It was shortly before Lady Hamilton's illness that I learnt this. It was by a simple incident—accident I cannot call it. You had left your photograph lying on the table for Marion. I was sitting reading behind the window curtain in the dining-room, and Hilda came in. She never saw me. She took up the photograph—and—and—I watched her look at it, as she had never looked at me. Then she lifted it up, and pressed her lips against it, and then the next moment flung it passionately down. I will not go on.—Next I heard a woman praying, Hayward—praying that she might always make me happy—asking God there on her bended knees to give her strength to conquer the feelings of her heart! It was a bitter moment—nay, I will not

deny it—but—but with God's grace I bore it. With God's grace I am able to tell it to you now."

As Jervis ceased speaking, a sob broke the silence in the room—a passionate, heart-wrung sob from Hayward.

"I—I—told her once," he said, in a faltering and broken voice, "that your heart was half in heaven, but—but I never knew before there was a man on earth who lived so near to God."

After a little while Hilda came into the sick room, and Hayward left it. There was no trace on Jervis' face, when Hilda returned, of the painful and unselfish words he had just spoken. Its sure serenity had always been one of the characteristics of this man's faith, and a great calm seemed to fall upon his spirit now. He had conquered the last mortal weakness of his heart when he told Hayward of Hilda's love; and his last days were spent in perfect peace.

He did not linger long. The unhappy woman beneath his roof—the vain and beautiful Isabel—had lain for many, many weeks on her bed of fever and of pain. But the pure-souled Jervis had a brief passage to the grave. Before he went he sent a message of farewell to Isabel by Hayward, and she wept some very bitter tears when she received it.

“What, dying!” she said. “It cannot—cannot be!”

“I fear there is no hope,” answered Hayward, much overcome.

Then Isabel cried out, “He is too good to live! and I have killed him; I—I brought this fever to his house, miserable woman that I am!”

“He is fit to go—he is truly fit to go, Isabel,” said Hayward, trying to say some kindly words to her. “Let this console you, Jervis need have no fear.”

But Isabel would not be comforted. She cried and moaned until Hayward began to fear some serious consequences

to her own health would be the result. He hinted this to her, and Isabel grew afraid.

"I dare not die," she said shudderingly.
"Hayward, I dare not die!"

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It was close on midnight when Jervis left them. For some hours he had been apparently insensible, but just before the end came, he opened his eyes and looked at the tear-stained faces gathered round his bed. He moved his lips as if to speak, but his voice was gone. Then he looked at Hilda and at Hayward. He smiled, and with a last effort held out his hand. They both clasped it—both held it fast during the next few moments—for in these next few moments the angels came for the soul of Horace Jervis.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THERE ARE NO TRICKS IN PLAIN AND
SIMPLE FAITH."

DURING the next dark dreary days—the days when the good man's earthly form lay still in the home which he had truly made a shelter to the homeless, there were bitter, bitter tears shed for Horace Jervis.

The young widow, with her hands clasped over her hot and swollen eye-lids, lay in her darkened room crushed down with self-reproach and grief. Ah, had she known of his last tender thoughts—of his unselfish words to Hayward—what would she have felt? As it was, she recalled, with bitter and heartfelt regret, his con-

stant kindness, his unfailing consideration and affection for herself.

And had she failed? How often she asked herself this question. Had she ever by look or word betrayed her secret—the secret that she had hidden in her breast,—and struggled with so long and sorely? She knew not, and guessed not, that the good man who had left her had learned this; that it had been a bitter blow to him. Jervis had never even hinted this to her. She had watched and waited on him, and when his last hours drew nigh, almost with awe she had seen his calmness, his peace, his serene and perfect joy. Once or twice in her sorrow she cried out, when he was giving her some directions about duties to be fulfilled after he was gone.

“Oh! Horace,” she said, with streaming eyes, “have you no regret at leaving me alone?”

“I am not leaving you alone, my dear one,” he had answered, “I am leaving you in the care of God.”

He knew at that moment he was leaving her an earthly protector also, but he said no word of this. It was better for her, he thought, that she should not know, and as he had lived, thinking of others, so he died.

There was a long procession followed him to his grave. But of whom did it consist? Not of the rich or the great of the vast city where he had toiled. In that long procession were the widowed, the fatherless, and the fallen—to all of whom he had been a friend.

There was one poor girl—one of those gay daughters of sin—a girl yet young and handsome, whom Jervis had tried most earnestly to save. She heard of his death, and when he lay in his coffin she came to his house, and asked to look upon his face once more. Her message was taken to Hilda; but Hilda had learned from the lips that now were closed, “that most excellent gift of charity,” and she sent down a few kind words to her erring sister.

So the girl went upstairs and looked on his dead face. Then she fell down by the side of the coffin, crying and weeping, saying that it was the face of an angel, and from that hour she would sin no more.

She followed him to his grave. Dressed in mourning, and crying bitterly, she stood by while the solemn and beautiful words of our funeral service were read in a broken and tear-choked voice by one of the many who had loved Jervis well. Then, just at the last she sprang forward, and flung a great bunch of blue forget-me-nots into the grave.

"I will never forget you!" she cried. "You were a good man—you tried to save me—and your words shall not be lost!"

She kept the promise that she made beside his grave. In after days Hilda, who had heard of this incident, helped her, and stood by her faithfully as a friend. Thus many of his good deeds lived after

him, and his name was blessed when he had long been dead:

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When the first bitter days of bereavement were past, Hilda and Lady Hamilton went to a quiet spot by the seaside. Change was necessary for them both, the doctors told Hilda, and Isabel was only too glad to learn that she might go.

She was recovering from her dangerous illness slowly and feebly. But the sea-air worked wonders for her, and in a little while the bloom began to steal back to her lovely face. When she saw this she grew inwardly restless, and impatient of the seclusion in which they lived. She hailed, therefore, joyfully the news that Hayward was coming to see them after they had been about a month at the little sea-washed spot on the coast, which he had chosen as a fitting retreat for Hilda during the first weeks of her widowhood.

Hilda, watching Isabel, saw her on the day that Hayward was expected throw aside the dress that she usually wore, and don a more becoming one. Then she began twisting her golden hair into some new fashion, and brought out her rings and ornaments. It was like a glimpse of the Isabel of old—the Isabel who had tried to win the admiration and love of every man who approached her.

But Hayward when he came scarcely looked at her. He looked at the sweet sad face beneath the widow's cap, and saw at once how ill, anxious, and weary Hilda still looked.

After the ordinary greetings between the three had passed, Isabel rose somewhat restlessly.

"My dear Hilda," she said, speaking and acting like the Isabel of old, and so unlike the terrified and trembling woman that he had seen lying on her sick-bed, that Hayward could scarcely help smiling, "I would like to have a few words on

business matters with Mr. Hayward—if you don't mind leaving us alone?"

Hilda's face flushed, but she at once rose to comply with Isabel's request.

"Why should Mrs. Jervis go away?" said Hayward, quickly. "She knows of everything that we can have to talk about."

It was now Lady Hamilton's turn to flush, but she answered Hayward coldly and haughtily—

"You forget, I think, that by that last insane will, Sir George left you the guardian of my son?"

"No, I do not forget that," said Hayward; but by this time Hilda was at the room door.

"Let me know when you have finished your conversation," she said quietly; and she left the room as she spoke.

Then Isabel took a turn across it, as if she were thinking, but presently stopped before Hayward.

"Well," she said, "about the boy? Do

you mean to bring him up to hate his mother?"

"No, certainly not," answered Hayward, energetically. "And I trust and hope, Lady Hamilton," he added, "that you will give me no cause to wish to do so."

"You mean you hope I'll turn good, and walk in the straight path, eh, Hayward?" said Isabel, with a little uneasy laugh.

"Yes," said Hayward, "I mean, I hope, that none of us will forget—what ought, what must be a lesson to us all—the death of Horace Jervis."

For a moment Isabel was silent. Then she said, "He was a good man—the only good man, Hayward, that I have ever known."

"He—he—was—" began Hayward, but he could not go on. The memory of Jervis's last unselfish words to him, of his last hand-clasp, utterly overcame him, and he turned away his head to hide his emotion.

"But we can't all be like Mr. Jervis," said Isabel, presently. "He was born good, I suppose, just like most of us are born—the other thing?"

Hayward did not speak.

"But I was not born good," continued Isabel; "and, in truth, Hayward, I am quite weary of living this quiet life down here."

"Where do you wish to go?" asked Hayward.

"Abroad——people won't cast up their hypocritical eyes quite as much at me there, you know. And as I shall be pretty well off as regards money——"

"Yes, you will be well off as regards money," said Hayward, as Isabel paused. "But, Lady Hamilton——"

"Well, what have you got to say?" said Isabel.

"Shall I tell you," continued Hayward, in a trembling voice, "what the good man who is gone said to me about you before he left us?"

"No, no," said Isabel hastily; "I would rather not hear, it will only make me uncomfortable."

"But he charged me solemnly," said Hayward, "to look after you. He said I was always to be your friend, and if you go away, Isabel——"

"You think I will go to perdition, no doubt?" said Isabel again, with that light uneasy laugh. "But," she added, after a moment's thought, "for the boy's sake I won't do that—perhaps for your sake, though you have not been over kind to me—but I can't stand the dulness here."

"But," hesitated Hayward, "you are a widow now—would it not be the best and wisest thing that you can do to marry Captain Warrington?"

"To marry Captain Warrington!" repeated Isabel, her face turning suddenly scarlet. "Do you know what that coward wrote to me, Hayward, on the day the trial went against me? He who ought

to have stood by me! He wrote to say that after such a public exposure he must decline to have anything further to say to me! What do you think of that?" she continued, passionately. "It was a gentlemanly action, wasn't it?"

"It was a cowardly action," said Hayward, "to strike you then, but——"

"Oh, yes, I know what you mean," said Isabel, still in a rage. "You mean that perhaps I would have married you before that if you had asked me? So I would——but he didn't know it, and he behaved like a scoundrel."

"We will not discuss it then," said Hayward. "What I meant was, you would be better married."

Isabel laughed.

"I had a happy experience, hadn't I?" she said. "No. I am free now, and for a while at least I mean to remain so."

Then she began asking Hayward about her money, and how it was to be sent, and making other arrangements for living

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entirely abroad. In vain Hayward argued with her.

"I mean to go," she said, looking at him, smilingly. "Will you come over to Paris to see me, or do you think I am too wicked for you to trust yourself with me?"

"I hope not," said Hayward, gravely. But he saw it was no use. Isabel meant to go. She was weary, as she told Hayward, of living with Hilda.

"She is always 'thinking,'" she said, "and I hate to think. So I want to live where I shall have no time to do so."

And thus she went away. She was a little—just a very little affected when she parted with Hilda.

"Good bye," she said, and she kissed Hilda's cheeks, which was a rare action of hers. "You have been very kind to me—you are not a bad kind of young woman—and I suppose by-and-bye, you and Hayward will be making a match of it!"

"What folly, what nonsense!" said Hilda, blushing scarlet."

"Oh, I dare say it will all come right," said Isabel, "and then——sometimes I'll come over, and see you——and Reggy."

Long afterwards Hilda told Hayward of Isabel's parting words about her little boy. And they often talked of them. These words left them a kind of hope—a hope, which, as time went on, and rumours of Isabel's life reached their ears—that they clung to in vain; for she has never come back. She lives in Paris, and when good women speak of the beautiful Lady Hamilton they cast down their eyes and sigh. But there are other women who envy her—envy her beauty, her diamonds, her gay, careless, and easy life. But these women were not with her when she lay in the darkened room in Jervis' house in her deadly pain. They were not with her when she was ashamed to live, and afraid to die. She hates to think, she told Hayward; but sometimes dark thoughts must

come back to her. Sometimes the skeleton that she hides away so well—hides beneath her gay attire, her laughter, and the excitement and whirl in which she lives—must shadow-like re-appear, warning her that the day will come when the dark hours of dread and fear will inevitably return.

But twelve months or more had passed away after Jervis's death before Hilda told Hayward that Isabel had spoken of coming back to see her little child. By this time Hayward had asked Hilda to be his wife. He did this even then with a certain feeling in his heart that he was speaking too soon. But he had a reason for doing so apart from Hilda.

This reason was that Marion Marston, who had lived with her sister during the last eight or ten months, had once or twice given Hayward what she called "a hint."

As we have seen, Marion Marston lacked in a very great degree, the sensitive and

refined temperament that distinguished her younger sister Hilda. So as she thought that Hayward came too much about the house without ever distinctly saying what he came for, and as she cherished certain ideas about becoming Mrs. Hayward herself, she contrived to allow him to see pretty clearly that she did so.

But if Hayward had ever thought of her she ended her chances on the day when she gave him her "hint." Hayward laughed at the time, said something pleasant, and then turned away. But the next time he went to the house he asked Hilda to be his wife.

When the faltering words had passed his lips—faltering and broken, yet understood by the blushing and agitated woman who listened to them,—Hilda was silent for a moment, and then looked up into his face, and held out her hand.

"Oh! Philip," she said, "is it not too soon to forget? To—to be so happy—"

"*He*, too, is happy, my dear, and he

wished it," answered Hayward; and as he spoke Hilda's head fell on the breast of the man whom she had loved so faithfully and so well.

THE END.



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including the names of the authors and the titles of the works.



